

**OPINION 6**

PAKISTAN PAYING FOR ITS MISPLACED PRIORITIES

**WORLD 8**

ELON MUSK MAKES SURPRISE VISIT TO BEIJING

**MONEY 10**

INDIAN STARTUP TO DEVELOP ELECTRIC AIR TAXI PROTOTYPE BY MARCH 2025

NEW DELHI, MONDAY APRIL 29, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 118  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

KKR WARY OF DC, MARAUDING MCGURK 12 SPORTS



## Pakistan's narco plot busted by India



Indian Coast Guard (ICG) personnel with 14 crew members of a Pakistani boat after apprehending them from Indian waters. ICG also seized narcotics from the boat. (PTI)

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**  
Indian Coast Guard (ICG) in coordination with the Narcotics Control Board (NCB) and anti-terrorist squad of Gujarat on Sunday seized 86 kilograms of drugs worth over ₹600 crore from a Pakistan boat and apprehended 14 crew off Gujarat coast. Giving details here, officials said in a breathtaking overnight operation, ICG undertook an intelligence

based anti-narcotics operation at sea. The operation was an epitome of inter-agency coordination wherein ICG, ATS and NCB collaborated seamlessly which culminated in the successful operation. The ships and aircraft of ICG were deployed on concurrent missions to effect the operation. ICG ship Rajratan, which had NCB and ATS officials embarked, positively identified the suspect boat. No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics

employed by the drug laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship Rajratan. Ship's specialist team embarked the suspect boat and after thorough checks, confirmed the presence of the sizeable amount of narcotics. The Pakistani boat, along with its crew, has been apprehended and is being brought to Porbandar for further investigations. The joint operations of ICG and ATS, which has led to eleven successful law

enforcement operations in the last three years itself reaffirms the synergy for national objectives. Incidentally, the seizure on Sunday just a day after the NCB busted three labs manufacturing the banned drug mephedrone, popularly known as 'meow meow', in Gujarat and Rajasthan and arrested seven people in connection with the matter. The anti-drugs agency has seized narcotics worth approximately ₹300 crore. The labs were busted after the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) of Gujarat Police received information from a confidential source regarding the labs operating in Gujarat and Rajasthan, producing the drug mephedrone. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on February 28 this year lauded the Indian Navy and NCB's joint operation in seizing almost 3,300 kilograms of contraband off the coast of Gujarat and called it a 'testament' to the Government's unwavering commitment to making India a drug-free nation. The Narcotics Control Bureau, along with the Indian Navy, intercepted a suspicious boat off the Gujarat coast, seizing nearly 3,300 kilograms of contraband. **Continued on Page 2**



### Village guard martyred in JK

**MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU**

A member of the Village Defence Guard (VDG), part of security forces combing a forest area to track down terrorists, sacrificed his life during a gunfight with the ultras in a remote village of Basantgarh in the Udhampur district on Sunday. This marks the third incident of terrorist-related violence in poll-bound Jammu and Kashmir since last week. This is the first major terrorist strike in the area after 2018. Till the time of filing the report massive cordon and search operations were mounted in the thickly forested belt to track down the footprints of the group of terrorists. A joint team of security forces led by elite Para commandos of the Indian Army were rushed to the spot to flush out the hiding group of terrorists, believed to have infiltrated recently from the border belt of Kathua. Senior Army, police and CRPF officers rushed to the spot to synergise anti-terrorist operations. According to ground reports, aerial surveillance was also mounted to prevent the terrorists from breaching the outer cordon in the area while area domination parties were closing in with utmost care to avoid more collateral damage during the anti-terrorist operation. According to a statement issued by the Jammu and Kashmir police, "J&K Police sprang into action after intel on terrorists near Basantgarh Police station of Udhampur district. The clash erupted as police confronted hiding terrorists. One VDG member was injured." **Continued on Page 2**

## Poll tension escalates in NE

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI/ IMPHAL / KOHIMA**

Amidst the heavy deployment of a security forces for ensuing general elections, several parts of North East India particularly Nagaland, Manipur again, Assam have been hit by violence. People from Nagaland made a beeline to neighbouring Assam to buy essential commodities as the indefinite shutdown of businesses to protest "extortion" by Naga political groups threw normal life out of gear in the State with the stir entering the third day on Sunday. While in Manipur which continues to be strife torn for more than a year now, one person was killed and three others injured in a gunfight between village volunteers of two warring communities in ethnic strife-torn Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Sunday. Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh strongly condemned the militant attack on security forces in Bishnupur district that claimed the lives of two CRPF personnel and vowed to nab the culprits without delay. The Nagaland shutdown was called by the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) on Friday also to protest alleged government inaction to protect businesses in Dimapur, the commercial hub of the state. The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries supported the call, following which shutdowns were imposed in other districts from Saturday. Markets remained shut across the State, with people from Nagaland, especially those living along the inter-State boundary with Assam, went to the neighbouring State to buy essential commodities. **Continued on Page 2**



### Repolling in Manipur's six booths on April 30

**PTI ■ IMPHAL**  
Repolling will be held in six polling stations in the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on April 30, officials said. The repolling was necessitated as unidentified persons had damaged EVMs and VVPATs before the completion of voting at four of these six polling stations on April 26, while EVM malfunctioning was reported at one polling station, and voting could not be completed at another due to "threat and intimidation by unknown miscreants", they said. Voting at four polling stations in Ukhrul assembly segment, and one each in Chingai assembly seat in Ukhrul and Karong in Senapati was declared null and void and repolling will be conducted on April 30, a notification issued by the office of Manipur's Chief Electoral Officer said.



## Blow to Congress as Delhi Congress chief resigns

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

In a big jolt to the Congress in Delhi ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Arvinder Singh Lovely resigned from his post citing various issues including, alliance with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and selection of party candidates for North West Delhi and North East Delhi parliamentary seats. The shock resignation of Lovely less than a month before the seven seats of the national Capital go to polls, has put the grand old party's Lok Sabha election campaign in limbo. This was the second resignation by a former Minister to hit the Congress in the Capital in less than a week. Lovely was appointed as the Delhi Congress president on August 31, 2023. In his resignation letter sent to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday, Lovely also said all unanimous decisions taken by the senior Delhi unit leaders have been "unilaterally vetoed" by AICC Delhi in-charge Deepak Babaria. Lovely also claimed the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) was not given any intimation about the decision to field Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi seat and Udit Raj from North West Delhi seat before the

official announcement was made by the party high command. Kharge accepted the resignation of Lovely. Later addressing a Press conference, Lovely said he has only resigned as chief of the Congress' Delhi unit and is not joining any other political party. His clarification came after Congress former MLA Asif Mohammad Khan claimed that the BJP would field Lovely from the East Delhi constituency, replacing Harsh Malhotra. "I have only resigned as Delhi Congress chief and I am not joining any political party," he said. Lovely said his resignation reflected the pain of Congress workers saddened by the fact that the "ideals they had been fighting for during the last seven to eight years" were being compromised. In his letter, Lovely said several AAP Ministers have been jailed over corruption charges, still the Congress formed an alliance with Arvind Kejriwal's party for the Lok Sabha elections amid opposition by party workers. On instructions from AICC General Secretary (Organisation), I even went to the extent of visiting Kejriwal's residence on the night of his Arrest along with Subhash Chopra and Sandeep Dikshit, despite the same being against my position on the matter, Lovely said. **Continued on Page 2**

## EC asks AAP to modify its poll campaign song

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

The Election Commission (EC) has asked the Aam Aadmi Party to modify the content of its Lok Sabha elections' campaign song, 'Jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge'. While the Aam Aadmi Party has claimed the poll body has "banned" its Lok Sabha campaign song. Sources in the Chief Electoral office of Delhi said the AAP was asked to modify the contents of the song since it violated EC's guidelines and advertising codes. The over two-minute campaign song, penned and sung by AAP MLA Dilip Pandey, was released at the party headquarters here on Thursday. Sources from the Delhi Chief Electoral Office said the song was not banned but the party was asked to resubmit the proposal with certain modifications, in accordance with Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and ECI guideline/norms circulated through a letter dated August 24, 2023, for the certification. The Delhi poll panel said



certain images and phrases are "slanderous" remarks and "criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts" and also cast aspersions on the judiciary and police. Addressing a Press conference, AAP senior leader Atishi accused the Election Commission of becoming a "political weapon of the BJP" and turning a blind eye to its violations. She also asserted that the campaign song does not mention the BJP and does not violate the Model Code of Conduct. "It includes factual videos and incidents, whether it is the picture of Arvind Kejriwal's arrest, whether it is the video of police's misbehaviour with Manish Sisodia in the Rouse Avenue

Court, whether it is the brutal detention of our volunteers in protests, everything is factual. "Does the EC want to suppress the truth? Does the poll agency want to hide the misconduct of the police or the political misuse of the probe agencies by the BJP?" she asked. Reacting to this, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor has said that the Aam Aadmi Party leaders master the art of playing victim card, they first violate laws and when objected to by any authority or person they start playing victim card. Kapoor has said that as per law content of campaign song or campaign pamphlets need to be approved by the Chief Electoral Officer Delhi prior to public launch. **Continued on Page 2**

## Trouble mounts for Gowda's grandson

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU**

The Karnataka Government on Sunday constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe an alleged sex scandal involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is the grandson of JD(S) supremo and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda. The move came following a letter by chairperson of Women's Commission Dr Nagalakshmi Chowdhary to the Government. The 33-year-old Prajwal was the NDA candidate in the Hassan Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls on April 26. The JD (S) joined the NDA in September last year. The SIT of IPS officers is led by the Additional Director General of Police (CID) Bijay Kumar Singh. The other two are Assistant Inspector General of Police Suman D Pennekar and Mysuru Superintendent of Police Seema Latkar. The SIT has been directed to complete its investigation soon. Some explicit video clips allegedly involving Prajwal had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days. The decision to constitute an SIT was announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The police have information that Prajwal, who is the son of MLA and former Minister H D Revanna, has left the country,



according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's office. Dr Chowdhary on Thursday wrote to Siddaramaiah and state police chief Alok Mohan seeking a probe into the videos that are in circulation in Hassan. Through his election agent, Prajwal has lodged a complaint with the authorities that the videos are "doctored" and being circulated to tarnish his image ahead of the elections. SIT will be responsible for bringing him back and continuing the investigation. We will not tell the SIT to do the investigation this or that way." Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "...We are hanging our heads in shame." "I saw in the media that he has 'escaped'. This is an

unpardonable crime. It is a matter of shame. He is an MP and the grandson of a former Prime Minister. He represented the same constituency which the former Prime Minister had represented," Shivakumar, also state Congress chief, said. It said already an FIR has been lodged at the Holenarasipur police station under section 354(A) (Sexual harassment), 354(D) (Stalking) and 506 (Criminal Intimidation) and 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code, which the SIT will investigate in detail. The order said all the cases registered in various parts of the state should be transferred to the SIT, which will utilise the resources of the CID during the investigation. JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said he would like to wait for the facts to come out of the investigation into an alleged sex scandal involving his nephew and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, but asserted that there is no question of forgiving anyone who has committed a crime as per law. He said he has nothing to do with Prajwal Revanna reportedly leaving the country, and it is the responsibility of the SIT to get him back if required.

## Delhi, other State Legislative meetings dwindle

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

Data compiled by think tank PRS Legislative Research shows that the State Assemblies of Delhi, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Telangana and Nagaland have been meeting for fewer than 22 days a year, with the number of sittings decreasing over time. Among States, the Maharashtra Assembly met for the highest number of days (41), followed by West Bengal (40), and Karnataka (39). Notably, in 2023, State legislatures passed more than 500 Bills, and scrutinised their State Budgets,

cumulatively worth about ₹53 lakh crore. The data shows state assemblies sat for an average of 22 days in 2023, and the average duration of sittings was five hours. In 2023, seven states continued sessions for more than six months without proroguing it, and with long gaps between sittings, it said. Maharashtra met for the highest number of days(41), followed by West Bengal (40), and Karnataka (39). At least 13 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, and Telangana met for less than 20 days. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Uttarakhand met for less than 10 days. Goa doubled its sittings from 13 in



2022 to 26 in 2023. Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Telangana also met for more days in 2023, as compared to 2022. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab met for fewer days in 2023 as compared to the previous year. Kerala, which met for 61 days in 2021, and 41 days in 2022, only had 29 sitting days in 2023. The Constitution mandates state legislature sessions to be held at least once every six months. Almost 62 per cent of sittings were held during the budget session. This figure was 61 per cent in 2022 and 2021. Gujarat and Punjab

held more than 80 per cent of their sittings in the budget session. Tamil Nadu held 72 per cent of its sittings in the budget session, lower than 91 per cent in 2022. In Delhi, the same session continued from March to December 2023, with 14 sittings. Punjab Assembly session held between March and October 2023 had 10 sittings. Punjab had approached the Supreme Court in February 2023, stating that the Governor was not summoning the Budget Session. The court stated that the governor was bound by the advice of the state Cabinet. Meanwhile, in Rajasthan, the assembly session in 2023

continued from January to August. In 2021 and 2022, Rajasthan had only one session, which continued from January to December. In West Bengal, a session that began in July 2023 was not prorogued till March 2024, and the session held in February to pass the Budget did not start with the customary address by the Governor. In Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, sessions continued for more than a year. In Sikkim, the session which began in March 2022 was prorogued only in April 2023. In Telangana, one session continued from September 2021 till August 2023, when the term of the House ended. **Continued on Page 2**





# Real Kerala Story turns sour as Begum unearths secrets

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

When Doordarshan, the public broadcaster, aired the movie "The Kerala Story", a film based on real life incidents attributing to Love Jihad, the secular brigade went berserk and staged agitations demanding the cancellation of the screening of the film. "This is an attempt to portray the State in bad light in front of the world and we strongly object the Doordarshan airing a movie like this," said Pinarayi Vijayan, chief minister of the State.

Thousands of Hindu and Christian girls had been trapped in love relationship by love jihadis, made them convert to Islam and sent away to the war-torn Syria, Jordan and Iraq to fight with the IS terrorists. These girls were dumped as sex slaves in IS strongholds after some time. Last month (March 2024) saw the Kerala experiencing a frenzy under the title "The Real Kerala Story" which told how people came together and pooled in Rs 34 crore as blood money to save the life of a Kozhikode youth from death penalty in a Saudi Arabia

prison. Abdul Rahim, a resident of Kozhikode district had come to Saudi in November 2006 with a house driver visa was given the task of looking after his master's son, a paralysed boy of 15 years who needed round-the-clock aid. The boy had a contraption attached to his neck through which he breathed and was fed. In December 2006, Rahim has taken the boy out for a ride as per his master's order. While he was driving the car, the boy got furious and spat on the face of Rahim. The driver claims that he pushed the boy down to escape from his wrath and in the melee the contraption fell down resulting in the boy's death.

Shocked over by the development, Raheem telephoned his friend who rushed to the spot and they together made a story that the car came under attack of robbers and it was during the attack, the boy lost his life. But the investigators established in the court that it was a case of murder. The trial court sentenced Rahim to death which was upheld by the Supreme Court of that country. Though Rahim's family sought clemency

of death sentence, the victim's family was adamant that the accused should face the death sentence.

Despite the Supreme Court's decision well wishers of Rahim tried to save the youth from the gallows and the court asked the relatives of the victim whether the accused could be saved from death by accepting blood money which ran to Rs 34 crore. This was flashed across Kerala as a major breakthrough and "Save Rahim" initiative succeeded in mobilizing Rs 34 crore through crowd finding. It is here the story took a twist.

The CPI(M), Congress and the Muslim League lambasted the Narendra Modi Government for its indifference to Rahim's case. Begum Nuzrath Jahan, a social activist from Kozhikode, who had cultivated a network of friends and officials in West Asian countries got into he act and spoke to highly placed Saudi officials who informed her that the report on blood money was fake. "The Court had asked the family of the victim whether they would agree to a deal involving the accused pay blood money and pardon

Rahim from undergoing death penalty, I even spoke to Alavikkutty Musliyar, a Keralite who worked as a translator in this case. He told me that no such deal has been brokered," Nuzrath Jahan told The Pioneer.

She said this was a serious issue but the Saudi Government has not intimidated the Indian embassy in Riyadh anything about this case. If only a Government to Government communication takes place, the Indian Government could speak to the Saudi Government in cases like this. Don't you think Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Foreign Minister Dr Jayasankar will sit idle once they are intimidated about such a deal?" asked Nuzrath Jahan. Now, the question is who authorised whom to crowd-fund the blood money and what are they going to do with the money so collected.

Nuzrath Jahan also mentioned that the possibility of hawala racket and money laundering should be probed in this case. "Kerala's Real Story" has turned out to be an embarrassment to liberals, secularists and anti-fascist forces.

# Defer Lok Sabha polls on Anantnag Rajouri seat: Ball in EC court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The sudden closure of Mughal road, connecting the Shopian district with Poonch, due to fresh snowfall and inclement weather conditions has further pushed the ball into the court of the Election Commission of India as it is likely to decide on whether to defer the polling day on the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat.

Meanwhile, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo and Chief Electoral Officer PK Pole have submitted a detailed report about weather and road conditions in the Anantnag-Poonch-Rajouri (APR) Parliamentary constituency to the Election Commission of India (ECI). The polling is scheduled for May 7 during the third phase of polling.

According to official sources, the Returning Officer collected feedback from all the contesting candidates and their authorized representatives on record before replying to the Chief Electoral Officer.

After analysing the ground reports the Election



Commission is expected to take a call on whether to revise the schedule of Anantnag's seat or go ahead with the current date.

The ECI had earlier sought a report on weather conditions, accessibility and other factors etc in the Anantnag constituency following representations submitted by political parties and three candidates seeking rescheduling of the election due to adverse weather conditions including snowfall on Mughal Road and Pir Ki Gali.

Prominent candidates in the fray from Anantnag include PDP chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, former Minister Mian Altaf (National Conference), Zaffar Manhas (Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party) and Advocate Mohammad Parry (DPAP). The BJP hasn't fielded any candidate in Anantnag constituency.

# BJP organises birth centenary celebration of Karpooori Thakur

SAMAR PANDEY ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP Poorvanchal Morcha organised the birth centenary celebration of Bharat Ratna Karpooori Thakur at Arbedkar International Centre on Sunday in the Presence of many senior BJP leaders and people from the Poorvanchal region in Delhi.

Many senior BJP leaders were present there including Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva, MP Manoj Tiwari and Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary. Thousands of people from the Poorvanchal region in Delhi attended the event including YouTube influencer Manish Kashyap associated with the BJP Poorvanchal Morcha.

A short video film was screened at the event on the life and achievements of Thakur, emphasizing his significant contributions to Indian politics.

Samrat Chaudhary praised Thakur's legacy, highlighting his role in the fight for the cause of the poor. He credited Thakur with revolutionary progressive measures such as



reserving 4% for women despite opposition.

Chaudhary also praised Prime Minister Modi for fulfilling Thakur's dream of seeing a marginalized individual become the Prime Minister. He further said that Bihar has had two Chief Ministers who banned alcohol while Delhi has a Chief Minister who indulged in corruption related to alcohol.

Virendra Sachdeva underscored Thakur's dedication to ensuring government schemes reached every household, noting the Modi government's alignment with Thakur's vision.

Manoj Tiwari praised Prime Minister Modi for recognising Thakur's work and the good policies that help the country. He further said that the past governments did not give enough credit to Thakur.

# It is because of conspiracy of BJP, CPM that 25,000 people have lost jobs: Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Taking a sharp aim at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress and the Left in one shot Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said while the former was a peddler of bluffs, the latter were true aides of the BJP insofar as they were helping in slicing the Trinamool Congress votes to help the saffron party win.

"The Prime Minister is a peddler of lies ... rather I should say he is bluffing the country ... dividing the people in the name of religion to win the elections ... Modi is bluffing the people by telling that the women's ornaments would be seized" and the citizen's wealth would be taken away if other parties came to power," Banerjee said.

Asserting that "if the BJP returns to power then there

will be no election in India again ... if they return to power they will sell the country like they have been doing ... they will sell the religions, they will sell the culture and they will sell everything India stands for," Banerjee said "they will come as they do before the elections and distribute money to buy votes but they should not be allowed to do so ... we must defeat the BJP."

She said, how Modi "only spreads hatred and divides the people in the name of religion ... he divides dalits, OBCs ... he divides man from man in the name of Citizenship Amendment Act, Uniform Civil Code and National Register for Citizens but we will not let that happen in Bengal."

The Chief Minister was speaking at election rallies in Malda South and North con-

stituencies of North Bengal. The erstwhile Malda constituency a strong bastion of the then Railway Minister ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury has been divided into two seats of Malda North and South.

While Malda North seat is held by BJP's Khagen Murmu a former CPI(M) MLA, Malda South seat was last time won by Congress' Abu Hasem Khan Chowdhury.

Recounting how the BJP Government had deprived by not paying its dues in 100-days' work and other schemes Banerjee said "on the one hand they deprive economically and on the other hand they publicise their own names on the ration bags as you can see the picture of the Prime Minister or the BJP's logo on them ... why should they give such publicity pictures when both the State



and the Centre are paying for the ration."

Hitting the Prime Minister hard for referring to the 26,000 illegally appointed school staff who lost their jobs upon a Calcutta High Court order, the Chief Minister asked "whether you are happy that these people have lost their jobs?"

She said, "it is because of the conspiracy of the BJP and the

CPI(M) that 25,000 people have lost their jobs ... the BJP is a job eater ... they cannot give jobs but they can take them ... they can increase prices, and sell the country but cannot create employment whereas the TMC government is sitting with lakhs of jobs for the people."

In an apparent attempt to stoke the "BJP-TMC" binary in Bengal Banerjee attacked

the Left and the Congress for helping the saffron outfit by dividing votes to make the path of the BJP smooth.

Saying that there was no existence of Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance in Bengal Banerjee said, "There is no INDIA in here ... it is outside of Bengal and after the elections the TMC will play a big role in Delhi to make INDIA a viable force but in our State the Left and the Congress have joined hands in the name of INDIA --- which anyway was conceived and christened by me --- to help the BJP win."

Elsewhere at an election rally in the neighbouring Murshidabad district BJP president JP Nadda rained fire on the Chief Minister for her policy of appeasement.

"Instead of bringing a majboot sarkar (strong Government) in the Centre

the TMC was trying to bring a "majboor sarkar (helpless Government)" which would be dependent on the allies and would follow the policies of appeasement and corruption, he said.

Saying that Banerjee's policy was to support "soft terrorism" he reminded how the Bengal Government was opposing the CAA and in turn supporting infiltration.

"Her Government has sympathy for those who terrorise people but not those who love the motherland," he said.

Referring to the land grab and sexual harassment of women at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas by TMC strongmen Sheikh Shahjahan, the BJP leader said, "the way the women were tortured and the way her Government tried to protect the people like Shahjahan is very unfortunate particularly in a State that is

led by a woman Chief Minister."

While both Malda and Murshidabad are Muslim majority districts the population of the Muslims in Malda is about 55 per cent whereas the account for about 66 per cent in Murshidabad.

Like in Malda North constituency which is already held by the saffron party, the BJP is seeing a hope in Murshidabad too where the party has fielded Nirmal Kumar Saha a doctor at Behrampur seat.

He is contesting against Bengal Congress president and five-time MP Adhir Chowdhury backed by the Left and the TMC's Yusuf Pathan a former India cricket player.

The remaining two seats of Murshidabad and Jangipur are presently held by the TMC.

# Tihar revoked permission for Sunita to meet husband: AAP



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday claimed that the Tihar Jail administration have revoked the permission for the wife of jailed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to meet her husband.

"The meeting, which was scheduled for tomorrow (Monday), has now been cancelled, leaving both the Kejriwal family and AAP supporters dismayed," said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), adding that the Tihar Jail administration has not cited any reason yet for cancelling Sunita Kejriwal's meeting.

However, the prison administration is yet to respond to the AAP claims.

Kejriwal, who was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise scam, is lodged in Tihar's Jail No-2.

The jailed Delhi CM, Kejriwal, has provided a list of six individuals, with whom he wants to meet in prison.

The ED has termed CM Kejriwal the "kingpin and the key conspirator" of the alleged excise scam in collusion with other ministers of the Delhi government, AAP leaders, and other persons.

# Pakistan's narco...

From Page 1

The Indian Navy, in a statement, declared this seizure the "largest" in recent times in terms of quantity. The items seized included 3,089 kg of charas, 158 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 25 kilograms of morphine.

Commending the joint operation, Home Minister Shah posted on X, "Pursuing PM Narendra Modi's vision of a drug-free Bharat, our agencies today achieved the grand success of making the biggest offshore seizure of drugs in the nation. In a joint operation carried out by the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police, a gigantic consignment of 3132 kilograms of drugs was seized."

He also said, "The historic success is a testament to our government's unwavering commitment to making our nation drug-free. On this occasion, I congratulate the NCB, the Navy, and the Gujarat Police."

# Blow to Congress...

From Page 1

Lovely further said while he respected the party's alliance decision with AAP, he was upset by Congress's North East Delhi seat candidate Kanhaiya Kumar praising AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal. The resignation of Lovely, which is also shared on his social media account, brought into public domain the internal rift in the Delhi unit of the party. It also showed the discontent within the grand old party's local unit over its alliance with foe-turned-friend Aam Aadmi Party. The prevailing situation in Delhi Congress and its tie up with the AAP may impact the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi which will go to polls on May 25.

Talking to the pioneer, over dozen of Congress leaders said they will not be involved in the election process.

Last week, four time MLA and 15 years minister in the Sheila Dikshit regime in the national capital, Rajkumar Chauhan also resigned last week alleging that he was mistreated by a senior functionary when he questioned the basis on which the candidate for North West Delhi constituency was decided.

According to party insiders more than dozen of senior leaders and former MLAs are upset with the top leadership and they sidelined himself from the electioneering process.

He claimed that since his appointment as the president, the party's Delhi In-charge has not allowed him to make any senior appointments in the DPCC. "However, since I cannot protect the interests of the party workers, I see no reason to continue in the said post. Therefore, with great regret and an extremely leaden heart, I, Arvinder Singh Lovely, do hereby tender my resignation from the post of DPCC President," he said.

Mentioning about the Congress-AAP alliance, Lovely said, "The Delhi Congress unit was against an alliance with a party which was formed on the sole basis of levelling false, fabricated and malafide corruption charges against the Congress and in turn, whose half of the cabinet ministers are presently in jail on corruption charges. Despite that, the party made a decision to ally with the AAP in Delhi."

# Delhi, other...

From Page 1

Despite the low number of sittings, State Assemblies passed more than 500 bills as well as state budgets worth over Rs 53 lakh crore in 2023. In 2023, 44 per cent of all the bills passed in assemblies were passed within a day of introduction.

Gujarat, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Puducherry, and Punjab assemblies passed all Bills on the day they were introduced, or the very next day.

Kerala and Meghalaya assemblies on the contrary took more than five days to pass more than 90 per cent of their Bills. While 59 per cent of bills received the Governor's assent within a month. In seven states, including Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, all bills received assent within a month. The states with the highest percentage of bills (passed in 2023) that did not get assent within two months were Assam (80 per cent), Nagaland (57 per cent), Jharkhand (50 per cent) and West Bengal (50 per cent).

In West Bengal, on average, a

bill received assent 92 days after its passing. Other states where it took a comparatively longer time for bills to receive assent are Assam (73 days), Jharkhand (72), Kerala (67), and Himachal Pradesh (55).

"When Assemblies sit for a few days, and meet for only a few hours on these days, the time spent on transacting business is also low. In 2023, five states met for less than 50 hours. Seven states met between 50 and 100 hours, eight states between 100 and 150 hours, and six States for 150 hours or more. In 2023, 44 per cent of all the Bills passed, were passed on the day they were introduced in the Assembly or the very next day. The trend was also similar in the last two years (56 per cent in 2022, and 44 per cent in 2021). In 2023, five States - Gujarat, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Puducherry, and Punjab passed all Bills on the day they were introduced, or the very next day.

These States passed all Bills within a day in 2022 and 2021 as well," the data says.

# Village guard martyred in...

From Page 1

The joint operation was still underway with the Army & CRPF. A police spokesman in Jammu added, "Today morning, a party of police picket Sang carrying along with them VDG members proceeded towards Chochru Gala heights where a face-off ensued with a group of hiding terrorists."

Official sources in Basantgarh told The Pioneer, "The VDG member had initially received bullet injuries when a police party came face to face with the terrorists. However, the VDG member later succumbed to his injuries. The deceased VDG member has been identified by the Jammu and Kashmir police as Mohd Sharief S/O Abdul Rahman R/O Khaned. He is survived by his family of five daughters and other loved ones. The mortal remains of the VDG member were shifted to PHC, Basantgarh where a team of doctors conducted the postmortem before handing over the dead body to the family for the final rites. On April 23, the brother of a Territorial army personnel, working in the Social Welfare Department was shot dead in cold blood by 'unidentified' terrorists while he was returning home after offering prayers in the village Kunda Top of Thanamandi area in the Rajouri district.

# Poll tension escalates...

From Page 1

No restriction on the movement of people and traffic has been imposed. The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CNCCI) announced that the indefinite state-wide shutdown would continue but would be relaxed only for six hours from noon to 6 pm on Monday to allow the public to procure essential items.

CNCCI president Khekugha Muru said the decision was taken in consideration of the fact that the shutdown was imposed in many districts without giving prior notice to the people.

CNCCI urged the government to take steps to stop "unabated" extortion, and intimidation by underground groups.

State Home Commissioner Vikeyie Kenya has directed the police to take stringent measures as "such activities reflect adversely on the law enforcing agency as well as on the state government".

He instructed the district

administrations and the police to report any violation of the ceasefire ground rules to the Ceasefire Monitoring Group for appropriate action and also continue arresting "underground cadres", found extorting, under the National Security Act.

On the other hand, the DCCI on Saturday submitted a five-point charter of demands to the state government through the deputy commissioner of Dimapur.

DCCI demanded that the state government immediately clarify whether taxation by NPGs was legal or illegal. It also wondered whether the business community should pay GST or the taxation of NPGs.

The DCCI asked the government to declare "summoning business community members to NPG offices, camps and monitoring cells" as illegal and law enforcing agencies be empowered to act against such places.

The DCCI also demanded

that extortion, kidnapping, and waylaying of transport should be dealt with swiftly with full force and without impunity.

Further, dozens of gunmen had attacked Koutruk in Imphal West district on Sunday morning from elevated hilltops of neighbouring Kangpokpi district prompting village volunteers deployed in the fringe village to retaliate, the police said.

Exchange of fire gradually spread to adjacent villages of Kadangband and Senjam Chirang, they said.

Koutruk village has been witness to intense gunfights between village volunteers of two warring communities since ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year. It has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas for gun attacks.

More than 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May 3 last year.

# EC asks AAP...

From Page 1

This is the "first time in the history of the country that the Election Commission of India has banned the campaign song of any party to stop the campaign", she alleged. "This is the same Election Commission which sees nothing when the BJP is making fun of the Model Code of Conduct on a daily basis. But if the AAP leaders even breathe, they are served another notice."

"The most interesting thing is that throughout the campaign song, there is no mention of the Bharatiya Janata Party's name anywhere, but the

Election Commission of India says that 'if you talk about dictatorship, this is a criticism of the ruling party.'

In its reply to AAP over the song, the Delhi Chief Electoral office said the phrase 'jail ke jawaab me hum vote denge' contravenes provisions of ECI Guidelines and the Programme and Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994, sources said. It said that images showing a crowd carrying Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's photo in which he is behind bars cast aspersions on the judiciary, sources said.

It also said some clips showing party workers clashing with police incite violence, while frames showing Manish Sisodia being escorted by police show the latter in a negative light, they said.

The Delhi poll panel said certain phrases are "slanderous" remarks and "criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts" and also cast aspersions on the judiciary.

Maintaining that her party has done no wrong, Atishi appealed to the poll body "to pay attention to the fact that the BJP is flouting the Model Code of Conduct every day and stop the work of stalling the election campaign of the opposition".



# Lovely resignation brings Congress factional feud into open

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The shock resignation of Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely less than a month before the seven seats of the national Capital go to polls, has put the grand old party's Lok Sabha election campaign in limbo. The resignation brought the party's factional feud into the open, with a section of leaders on Sunday demanding the removal of AICC in-charge Deepak Babaria.

Lovely, in his resignation letter sent to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, and also shared on his social media account, brought into public domain the internal rift in the Delhi unit of the party. It also showed the discontent within the grand old party's local unit over its alliance with foe-turned-friend Aam Aadmi

Party. While the Aam Aadmi Party termed it as an internal matter of the Congress.

As the news of Lovely resignation spread, some party workers gathered outside Lovely's residence and raised slogans against AICC's Delhi in-charge Babaria who, meanwhile, stressed that all DPCC leaders were taken into confidence on the alliance issue and Lovely should have aired his views before the party panels. "Ahead of forming the alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, the DPCC leaders and workers were taken into confidence.

"He (Lovely) was part of all the committees and panels; he should have raised his objections back then. Anyone who distances themselves from any party or posts tends to find a reason to do so," Babaria told reporters. Reacting to the development

former Delhi minister and four time MLA from Mangolpuri, Rajkumar Chauhan, who resigned from the party on Wednesday, in a video, addressed to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, urged him to remove Deepak Babaria, in-charge of Delhi affairs post while supporting the decision of Lovely.

"Lovely has resigned. I have also resigned. The Delhi in-charge told me to get out of a meeting. Remove Delhi in-charge Deepak Babaria from Delhi and save Congress," said Chauhan adding Babaria can not win an election and he is not only dictating but also humiliating senior Congress leaders. "It seems Babaria was appointed as Delhi Congress in charge to destroy the party," he said. Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit empathised with Lovely over his resignation from the



post and said, "Being the Congress President and a Congress worker, he (Arvind Singh Lovely) has a personal pain. His pain is that we are struggling to bring back our old reputation in Delhi. Becoming the President of Congress is a crown of thorns. Despite this, he worked hard in the last 6-8 months and built the party," Dikshit also went to the resi-

dence of Lovely to meet him. Further he said that everyone felt that Congress is slowly gaining its old reputation back. "Everyone felt that Congress is slowly awakening and when we get 2 or 3 seats, it seems that if we give seats to people with the consent of all the people of Congress, then the work will go better in the future," Dikshit said.

Party leader Subhash Chopra claimed that it is their internal party matter and said, "I asked him what was the reason that he resigned (from the post of Delhi Congress chief). He said all the reasons have been sent to the party president. It is our party's internal matter and we will resolve it through discussion. He said he has only resigned from the post, not from the party."

Former Congress MLA Neeraj Basoya said, "Lovely has resigned after seeing the sentiments of the Congress workers. Babaria's style of functioning has created problems everywhere, be it Delhi or Haryana, and all the workers are angry," Congress leader Jai Kishan said this is not good for the party. The party has given tickets to outsiders. "How will we convince party workers to campaign for them," he added.

Interestingly Udit Raj who is contesting from north west seat from the party ticket, had abused Congress leaders including Sonia Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in the past," he said.

Congress leader Surendra Rajput said Kharge will decide the future course of action after Lovely's resignation. "I would only say that our alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party happened with his participation and as per his wish. The general elections are going on and one should keep personal expectations and aspirations aside for now," he said.

Earlier, a scuffle broke outside Lovely's residence here as his supporters allegedly pushed ex-Congress MLA Asid Mohammed Khan who had reached there after Lovely's resignation. Khan said, "This was an internal matter and

Lovely should have reached out to the Congress president. By releasing his resignation letter in the media, he is providing an advantage to the BJP." He alleged that BJP will replace its East Delhi candidate Harsh Malhotra and Lovely will be declared by the party as its candidate from the constituency. At a press conference later, Lovely made it clear that he has only resigned from the party post and is not joining any political party.

AAP senior leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said it was an internal matter of their senior ally Congress. "It won't be appropriate for me to comment on the matter. AAP is fighting on the four seats it is contesting with full strength and we are hopeful that people will vote for the INDIA bloc candidates on all the seven seats in Delhi," he said.

## Congress alliance with AAP for political reasons: BJP

SAUMYA SHUKLA/SAMAR PANDEY ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Sunday claimed that Congress and AAP came into alliance 'only for political reasons. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday claimed Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely resigned from the post as he could not tolerate efforts to divide the country and insult the majority community. Making this assertion, Sachdeva also said the BJP has always maintained that it is not about parties coming together but hearts coming together, and this was proven today when Lovely resigned.

Highlighting the contradictions in the INDIA alliance in the national capital, BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla said, "The Congress party has no mission or vision, it is only seeped in confusion, division, and contradiction. We have seen how this has been playing out, especially in Delhi. Workers of the Congress party were out on the streets of Delhi protesting against why tickets were given to people who had nothing to do with Delhi, like Kanhaiya Kumar, who had abused the armed forces and called the Naxalites as martyrs."

On the Congress and AAP alliance, Poonawalla said the



parties came together only for political reasons. "AAP had completely obliterated the existence of Congress in Delhi, saying they would put Sheila Dikshit and Sonia Gandhi in jail. The Congress had complained about how the AAP is involved in the liquor scam. But merely for political reasons, they have come together, that does not mean the voters will come together. Today the Congress is unable to retain its leaders because its own leaders are showing the mirror to Congress for its hypocrisy," he said.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly and South Delhi BJP candidate Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the resignation of Lovely shows how the grand old party is demoralised just ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. "The Congress has admitted defeat," he added. BJP media head Praveen Shankar Kapoor said slowly but surely, the BJP's statement is proving true that the INDIA alliance will be completely dissolved before May 25.

Sachdeva stated that the reason behind ending the INDIA alliance lies with the Congress,

which gave tickets to individuals like Kanhaiya Kumar and Udit Raj, who work to divide the country and insult the majority community. Every individual who wants to see India develop, who wants to witness the progress of the nation, will never ally with corrupt individuals like Arvind Kejriwal and anti-national figures like Kanhaiya Kumar. Sachdeva stated that the signal of Lovely's resignation was apparent on the day when Rajkumar Chauhan wrote a letter. Whether it's Rajkumar Anand, Rajkumar Chauhan,

or Arvind Singh Lovely, the common theme in their resignation letters was Arvind Kejriwal, the main reason for corruption. Giving a ticket to Kanhaiya Kumar was also one of the major reasons.

The Delhi BJP President stated that anyone who has a sense of patriotism cannot stand with people like Kanhaiya Kumar, who talks about breaking the country into pieces. Sachdeva stated that within Delhi, a new turn has begun with AAP stating that they will engage in corruption, misappropriation of public money, go to jail, but will shamelessly fight elections. The nepotism that Arvind Kejriwal condemned is now being continued by him, and Arvind Singh Lovely's resignation is just the beginning, as this series of resignations could continue further.

Senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Harsh Vardhan said it was inevitable as the grassroots workers had not accepted the AAP-Congress alliance. "I guarantee that after their defeat on June 4, the leaders of this alliance will start abusing each other again. Arvind Singh Ji's departure is just the beginning. The conscience of many such grassroots workers will awaken now," he wrote on X in Hindi.

## Vote to save democracy, Sunita exhorts Delhiites



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita on Sunday appealed to the public as a "daughter of Mother India" to vote against "dictatorship" and save democracy. As she sought support for AAP candidate Mahabab Mishra in the West Delhi constituency, she called her husband a "lion" whom nobody can break.

Sunita, standing through the sunroof of a vehicle, greeted voters as she was showered with flower petals. She said Kejriwal was jailed because he built schools, provided free electricity, and opened Mohalla Clinics. "Your chief minister is a sher. Nobody can break him or make him bow down. He is the son of Mother India. As a daughter of Mother India, I appeal to you to vote against

dictatorship and save democracy. Please understand the value of your vote," she said. With Kejriwal behind bars in a money laundering case, his wife continues to spearhead the AAP's poll campaign and hold roadshows. Sunita Kejriwal will also campaign for AAP candidates in South Delhi and New Delhi constituencies as well as in Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab, the party leaders said.

## AAP youth wing organises walkathon Walk for Kejriwal



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) youth wing on Sunday organised a walkathon, 'Walk for Kejriwal', in support of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal under the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign. The entire Delhi united against the conspiratorial arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the party said. A large number of youth and supporters participated in the program organized near Deshbandhu College in South Delhi. Delhi government's cabinet ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi, Rajya Sabha MP N D Gupta and national secretary Pankaj Gupta, along with AAP Lok Sabha candidates Somnath Bharti and Sahiram Palhalwan were in attendance. People were wearing yellow T-shirts with 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' written on them and holding AAP flags in their hands.

The BJP's so-called washing machine was also installed at the venue. Bharadwaj told people how after getting washed in this washing machine of the BJP, all the sins of the corrupt leaders are washed away. As a symbol, he put four people with the names of famous corrupt leaders in the washing

machine, including Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma, Maharashtra's Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, Lok Sabha candidate from Kurukshetra Naveen Jindal and MLA Janardhana Reddy, and after washing for some time, they came out purified.

Once these leaders are put in BJP's washing machine, they come out clean and are given big positions, like Lok Sabha candidates and Chief Ministers, said the AAP minister. Bharadwaj said the people of Delhi are running a campaign 'Jail ka Jawab Vote se' in protest against the way Kejriwal has been sent to jail. He said a diabetic patient (Kejriwal) was denied insulin for a month, an attempt was made to kill him. He is not being allowed to meet his family and MPs. It is obvious that efforts are being made to break Kejriwal, but he is not going to succumb, the minister asserted.

The senior AAP leader said it is clear that the Prime Minister is worried and the BJP is nervous. This nervousness is visible every day in their campaign. When the campaign started, the Prime Minister used to say that I will do this by 2047, I have a 20-year road map. He was claiming how he

will take the country forward after crossing 400 seats. The BJP's slogan was '400 Paar'. The self-proclaimed biggest party (BJP) said that it will change the Constitution. These people are not even talking about 2024, they are directly jumping to 2047. The BJP were making big claims while giving the complete road map for the next 25 years but now the Prime Minister is saying that if opposition parties come to power, then this will happen, that will happen, Bhardawaj said.

That means the Prime Minister is now seeing that this time the opposition party is going to form the government and the entire country is understanding this, he said. Atishi said the people of Delhi have come to express their support for Kejriwal through this walkathon. The BJP had thought that if they put Kejriwal in jail, then AAP would not be able to campaign. But today, the Aam Aadmi Party is not campaigning, rather the people of Delhi are campaigning for the Aam Aadmi Party and Kejriwal, she said adding the people of Delhi are contesting the elections, and the people of Delhi will win the elections.

## Nomination process for LS seats to begin from today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The nomination process for seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi is all set to begin on Monday after the notification of the sixth phase of polls for May 25. The electoral battle in Delhi is going to be a direct fight between BJP and the alliance of AAP and Congress. Officials said all arrangements have been made at the offices of the returning officers to accept the applications.

The nominations can be filed between 11am and 3pm till May 6 (Saturday and Sunday will remain non-working days), the documents will be scrutinised on May 7 and the last date to withdraw the candidature is May 9. While polling will take place on May 25, the votes will be counted on June 4. As on April 20, a total of 1.5 crore voters, including 81.6



lakh men, 69.4 lakh women and 1,215 belonging to third gender - will be eligible to cast their votes at nearly 13,000 polling booths across the city. The 2019 Lok Sabha polls witnessed 347 people filing their nominations but only 164 were left in the fray after scrutiny of documents and withdrawal of

Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi, Praveen Khandelwal from Chandni Chowk, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri from South Delhi, Yogendra Chandolia from North West Delhi, Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi and Kamaljeet Sahrawat from West Delhi. AAP has fielded Kuldeep Kumar (East Delhi), Sahiram Palhalwan (South Delhi), Mahabab Mishra (West Delhi) and Somnath Bharti (New Delhi). The Congress has given ticket to seasoned politician Jai Prakash Agarwal from Chandni Chowk, Udit Raj from North West Seat and Kanhaiya Kumar from North East seat. There is a huge resentment among the Congress workers and workers for giving tickets to Kanhaiya Kumar and Udit Raj. Even in his resignation letter to Mallikarjun Kharge, Arvind Singh Lovely has said

that tickets were given to two people who are total strangers to the Delhi Congress and party policies while referring to the candidature of Kanhaiya Kumar from Northeast Delhi and Udit Raj from Northwest Delhi constituencies. Lovely also criticised Kanhaiya Kumar for heaping praise on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is behind bars in a money laundering case. When asked about the development, Kumar said, "I don't know. I don't have any information. Let me gather the information from the party and then I will tell you."

Lovely accused Udit Raj of making "anti-party" statements in the press and disrespecting party workers. He claimed Raj had written several letters to him asking him to suspend various generational local party leaders.

## All Lok Sabha poll preparations completed in Gurugram: Official

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

District Election Officer and Deputy Commissioner Gurugram Nishant Kumar Yadav informed that all preparations regarding the upcoming Lok Sabha elections have been completed in Gurugram. Addressing a press conference on Sunday, Yadav said the sixth phase of voting in the Gurugram Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency is to be held on May 25. In nine assembly segments of the Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency, 2,407 general polling stations, 74 auxiliary polling stations and 86 polling stations for weaker section voters have been created. A total of 25,33,958 voters will exercise their franchise at all these booths. Of which 13,51,239 are male voters and 12,2,641 are female voters. The number of third-gender voters

in Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency is 78. Also, there are a total of 35, 559 voters above 85 years of age and the number of voters with more than 40 per cent disability is 15,231 in the Gurugram constituency. Voting time on May 25 has been fixed from 7 am to 6 pm.

"This time in the elections, people above 85 years of age and people with more than 40 per cent disability will be able to vote from home. As per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, within five days of the issuance of the notification, the BLOs of the concerned area will go door-to-door to the identified voters and

get Form 12-D filled and submitted. In this, it is the voter's discretion whether to fill out the form or not. He can also go to the polling station and cast his vote," Yadav said. Yadav said that the number of services voters in the district is 11, 349. At the same time, services voters working in the district and associated with essential services will be able to cast their vote through ballot paper in the office of the District Election Officer. Similarly, those services voters belonging to Gurugram Lok Sabha whose election duty has been assigned to Gurugram Lok Sabha constituency. They will be issued an Election Duty Certificate by the District Election Officer Based on which they will be able to cast their vote at their duty booth only. He said that the number of such voters in Gurugram district is around 4,000.

## Cab driver, passengers injured as speeding luxury car hits them

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A cab driver and two more people suffered serious injuries after a speeding luxury car hit their vehicle here, police said on Sunday. The incident took place early morning when a speeding Jaguar collided into the cab, two other vehicles and then a divider before coming to a halt near the Dhaura Kaun area of southwest Delhi, the police said. "A PCR call was received at 4.55 am regarding the accident of three vehicles and three injured individuals. A team, which was sent to the spot, found that the injured had been shifted to some unknown hospitals," Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Rohit Meena said. Later, at 8.32 am, the police received information from

AIIMS Hospital regarding the cab driver, identified as Harjeet Singh, and two other people, who were travelling in the same cab, DCP Meena said. Another senior police officer said that according to an eyewitness, one of the cars was driving on the wrong side. "An eyewitness told us that they heard a loud sound while they were asleep. They saw that two cars collided and then one of them collided with two other vehicles and a divider before coming to a halt," the police officer said, adding that they are verifying the eyewitness's claim. According to police sources, two people -- a man and a woman -- were travelling in the Jaguar car. They suffered minor injuries in the accident but fled the scene immediately after the incident, the sources said.



# Rahul insulting Indian maharajas for sake of appeasement politics: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ BENGALURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's rajahs and maharajas, but remaining silent on the atrocities committed by nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing back-to-back rallies in Belagavi, Sirsi, Davangere and Hosapete, he also continued his attack against the Congress on the "inheritance tax" issue and targeted the party's government in Karnataka on law and order, corruption and development issues.

"The BJP is working on increasing the assets of the people, but Congress's shehzada (referring to Rahul Gandhi) and his sister (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra), both are announcing that if they come to power, they will do an 'X-ray' of the country," Modi said. "They will X-ray your property, bank lockers, lands, vehicles, also 'streedhan' and ornaments of women, gold, the 'mangalsutra'. These people will raid every house and capture your assets. After capturing, they are talking about redistributing it, they want it to give it to their loved vote bank... Will you allow this loot to happen?" he asked. "I want to warn the Congress," Modi said.

"Let go of this intention. Until Modi is alive, I will not allow it..." Modi said. "Congress has ensured the writing of our history and our freedom struggle with an eye on appeasement and vote bank. Even today, the Congress's shehzada (prince) is carrying forward that sin. You might have heard Congress's shehzada's recent statement -- he says Bharath's rajahs and



maharajas were atyachari (oppressive)." "He (Gandhi) has accused them (rajahs and maharajas) of usurping the lands and properties of people and poor... Congress's shehzada has insulted great personalities like Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Kittur Rani Chennamma, whose administration and patriotism inspires us even today," the prime minister said. Recalling the contribution of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family, and saying they are respected across the country even today, Modi added, "The Congress's shehzada's statements were intentional, aimed at vote-bank politics and appeasement." "Shahzada spoke ill about rajahs and maharajas, but the shehzada's mouth was locked regarding the 'atyachar' that nawabs, nizams, sultans and badshahs committed in India's history. His mouth was shut on them, but on rajahs and maharajas he speaks ill and insults them," he said. Alleging that Gandhi cannot remember Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's oppressions, Modi said, "He (Aurangzeb) made a number of our temples impure and destroyed them. Congress is happily making alliances with parties that praise Aurangzeb... They don't remember people who destroyed our religious places, indulged in

killing, killing of cows. They don't remember the nawab, who played a role in the partition of India." He recalled the contributions of the Raja of Banaras in setting up Banaras Hindu University, and Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar in the reconstruction of temples. "The Congress's shehzada doesn't remember the contributions of rajahs and maharajas. For the sake of the vote bank, he shows the guts to speak against rajahs and maharajas, but doesn't have the courage to speak against nawabs, sultans and badshahs," he said, adding that Congress's "appeasement mindset" has come out in the open before the country, and that it reflects in their manifesto. Since the time Congress came to power in Karnataka, the law and order in the entire state has worsened. Citing the recent murder of Hubballi student Neha Hiremath on her college premises, which created a "sensation" in the country, he claimed that despite the family seeking action, Congress government gave priority to appeasement. Even when there was a bomb blast in a Bengaluru's cafe, the Congress government did not take it seriously initially; they even termed it a cylinder blast initially. "Why are you —

Congress — lying to the people of the country. If you can't, leave and go home," Modi said. The Congress, for the sake of votes, is taking the support of the banned PFI — the anti-national organisation that supported terrorism, he claimed. "To win one seat in Wayanad, are you surrendering to them? BJP has banned PFI and has put its leaders behind bars," he said. Stating that those who turned down the invitation for the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be rejected by the people in Lok Sabha elections, Modi attacked the Congress and its allies. A decision on building the Ram temple should have been taken the very next day of the country's independence, he said. He also alleged that the "same forces" tried till the last minute to ensure that the Ram temple was not built and had approached the court on the last day as well. Moreover, Modi claimed that the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" under which the parties in the opposition alliance will get the PM's post for one year each, in case they come to power. "With such a system, the good of the country cannot be expected," he said, as he urged the people not to waste their vote.

# RSS has always been in favour of reservation, says RSS chief Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday asserted the organisation has always been supportive of reservation, and advocated for its implementation as long as "discrimination exists," comments that came in the wake of a viral video claiming the Sangh was against the quota system.

The remarks also assume significance as the Opposition, especially the Congress has mounted an attack against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the ruling BJP at the Centre, accusing them of being opposed to reservation. Speaking at the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra here, Bhagwat referred to the video in circulation and said it falsely claims the RSS was opposed to reservation. The video shows him as holding a meeting, he said but claimed it never happened. "RSS has been supporting reservations as per the Constitution since the time it came."

"The Sangh says that reservation should continue till the time people, to those whom it is given, feel they need it; or, it is given due to social reasons till discrimination exists," he added. With the help of technology and Artificial Intelligence, what did not happen can also be shown (as to have happened), he said. Bhagwat's pro-reservation statement also comes in the backdrop of the Congress alleging that BJP and RSS are against the quota system. In his response to Bhagwat's remarks on the matter, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed though the RSS is now saying it was not against reservation, it had earlier spoken



about opposing the quota system.

Addressing a campaign rally at Daman and Diu on Sunday, Rahul said the Bhagwat "makes a statement that RSS is not against reservation." "It was he (Mohan Bhagwat) who had made a statement that he was opposed to reservation. Those who are against the reservation (policy) are joining their party (BJP). They welcome all those who are against reservation, and then he (Bhagwat) says he is not against reservation," Gandhi alleged.

Incidentally, in a sharp attack on the RSS, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had earlier said that when the organisation was founded in 1925, it had decided to announce the nation as a "Hindu country" and to scrap the reservations in 100 years, i.e by 2025. Meanwhile, Bhagwat said good as well as bad things circulate on social media and it is not the quality of social media but that of the person who is using it, he said. It is the selfishness of the person to circulate among people such made-up things and generate a controversy, but "we are not concerned with it" ("us se hamara koi sambandh nahi hai"), he said. Such things happen during the ongoing election environment, he opined.

# Central Government delegation on three days visit to Bangladesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Central Government delegation is on a three-day visit to Bangladesh beginning Sunday to further boost bilateral ties on governance matters, according to an official statement. The visit is being undertaken on the invitation of the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration and will focus on the mid-career capacity building programs in field administration for Bangladesh civil servants, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry on Sunday.

"V Srinivas, Secretary of Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) will lead a four-member delegation to Bangladesh from April 28-30, 2024 for bilateral discussions regarding renewal of memorandum of understanding (MoU) between National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) India and Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration for the period 2024-2029," it said. The NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration have collaborated for conducting capacity building programs for Bangladesh civil servants since 2014. Under the bilateral col-

laboration, 71 capacity building programmes were held and 2,600 Bangladesh civil servants have visited the NCGG since 2014, the statement said. "The Bangladesh government has emphasised on the utility of these training programmes and conveyed interest in renewal of the MoU between NCGG and the Bangladesh Ministry of Public Administration under which these training programmes are being organised for the next five years when it expires in 2025," it added. During the three-day visit, Secretary Srinivas will hold bilateral meetings with Minister of Public Administration, Senior Secretary Ministry of Public Administration, Director General of the Civil Services Administration Academy, Director General of the Public Administration Training Centre, Director General Governance Innovation Unit in the Prime Minister's Office and the Additional Secretary Career Planning and Training Wing of Ministry of Public Administration. Srinivas will address the participants of the law and administration courses and faculty of Bangladesh Civil Services Administration Academy on "Institutionalization of SMART Governance to Enhance Public Service Delivery", the statement added.

# PM is indifferent to people of Karnataka: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is indulging in "fear mongering" as he is "desperate" after facing a "washout" in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions for the Prime Minister ahead of his rallies in Karnataka.

"After the Phase II washout, a desperate PM is on a spree of Karnataka rallies today. Instead of lying and fear mongering, these are the questions he should answer," Ramesh said, listing his posers.

"Why have BJP MPs performed so poorly as the people's representatives? After a 7-month delay, why has the Centre released less than 20% of drought relief funds? Why is the Centre holding up the Upper Bhadra and Mahadayi projects?" the Congress leader said on X.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh asked where have BJP MPs been while the Modi government has been "unleashing its vengeance" on Karnataka. Citing the latest data from the Parliamentary Research



Service (PRS), Ramesh claimed that the BJP MPs from Karnataka have shown a blatant disregard for their responsibilities, and displayed lack of commitment to serving their constituents. "While the national average attendance in Parliament was 79%, the average of the 28 Karnataka MPs was even lower at 71%. The review revealed that 26 of these MPs never raised Karnataka's concerns - the release of MGNREGA funds, drought and flood relief assistance, and the Centre's denial of additional allocations of rice for PDS," he said. Analysing the transcripts of all debates, PRS found that very few MPs even tried to initiate policies or programmes to

address their constituencies' issues, Ramesh said. "Three MPs did not ask a single question in five years, and five MPs did not participate in a single debate. While most MPs were criticised for neglecting the state, seven MPs only focused on the RSS-BJP's unconstitutional agendas in their constituencies," he alleged. "Perhaps the most damning finding was that 14 of the 28 were directly or indirectly involved in abetting communal violence in their localities. Will PM Modi apologise for fostering these ineffectual MPs on the people of Karnataka? Or was this his design all along to elect non-performing BJP MPs so that he can ignore the voice

of Karnataka?" he said. Ramesh also said it has been more than seven months since the Karnataka government sought more than Rs 18,000 crore of relief from the Centre as per disaster relief rules. Karnataka is reeling under an acute drought situation, with 223 out of 236 talukas facing drought conditions and 196 taluks being categorised as severely hit, he noted. As early as September 2023, the Karnataka government had approached the Modi government to release funds of Rs 18,171 crore for drought relief, he said. "The rules of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, state that the Centre must take a final decision on the release of funds within one month of receiving the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) report. For Karnataka, this period expired in December 2023. Last month, the Finance Minister made the excuse that her hands are tied since the Model Code of Conduct came into force," he said. "After being forced to the Supreme Court by the Karnataka Government, the Centre has finally sanctioned funds but only a mere Rs 3,498 crore. This is less than

20% of the total amount requested," he said. Why is PM Modi so "indifferent" to the people of Karnataka, Ramesh asked. "In last year's Union Budget, the Modi government had proudly announced a Rs 5,300 crore grant for the Upper Bhadra Project. More than a year later, state Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda has revealed that not a 'single paisa' of this grant has been released," Ramesh said. During his assembly election campaign, Prime Minister Modi had also claimed to resolve long-standing issues with the Mahadayi-Kalasa Banduri Nala Project but earlier this year, clearance for the project has been deferred by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, he said. "These projects are crucial to expanding drinking water and irrigation access in a state that has been reeling under a severe drought. Why has the Modi Government neglected these essential infrastructure projects? What vendetta does the PM have against the people of Karnataka?" Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his "silence" on these issues.

# CDS Chauhan concludes comprehensive visit to France

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan concluded a comprehensive visit to France starting April 21, which has reaffirmed the continued long-standing strategic partnership between India and France, and further reinforcing the bilateral Defence Cooperation between the two nations, defence ministry said here on Sunday.

Giving details here, officials said the interactions of CDS with Patrick Pailloux, Director of Civil and Military Cabinet of the Minister of French Armed Forces, and Lt General Vincent Giraud, Chief of Military Cabinet of Minister of the Armed Forces at the apex level and also with his counterpart, General Thierry Burkhard (CEMA) have enabled exchange of views on areas of common interests and mutual security concerns. Deliberations at France's Directorate General of Armament for enhancing the exchange of high-end dual-use technologies followed by inter-



actions with the top leadership of the French Defence industry, including Dassault, Safran and Naval Groups, and Thales Alenia Space, towards futuristic capacity building of the Indian Armed Forces, would provide an impetus to indigenisation. The exchanges at the French Land Forces Command (CFT), the French Space Command (CDE), and the School of Military Studies (Ecole Militaire), while providing India's point of view on security challenges, have also provided opportunities for

enhancing defence collaboration in space, modernisation initiatives and also augmenting bilateral training between both nations. The CDS also paid tributes at the War Memorials of Neuve-Chapelle and Villers-Guislain, to the extraordinary bravery of soldiers of the Indian Expeditionary Force who fought on the Western Front during the First World War, towards enhancing peace and tranquility in the region. These memorials stand testimony to the long-standing Indo-French relationship.

# 2.4 billion workers at risk of heat exposure: ILO report

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ram Dayal (45), a seasoned plumber, found himself battling the scorching heat of a summer day while repairing a burst pipe on a roadside in the national capital. Despite his experience, the relentless heat left him feeling lightheaded and fatigued, prompting him to prioritise his safety by taking breaks in the shade to avoid heat exhaustion.

Ram Dayal's case is reflection of the challenges faced by millions of workers worldwide, as highlighted in a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO). The report reveals that a staggering 2.4 billion workers, constituting 70% of the global workforce, are at heightened risk of heat exposure due to climate change. This alarming trend has sharply increased since 2000, with dire consequences such as heat-related illnesses claiming



nearly 19,000 lives annually and causing chronic health issues for millions. The hazards posed by climate change extend beyond heat exposure, impacting workers across various sectors. From agriculture and construction to fishing and transport, outdoor workers face elevated risks of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke. Moreover, indoor workers are not immune, facing risks from sources of heat or poor ventilation.

The report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate', describes a "cocktail of hazards," including increased exposure to harmful ultraviolet radiation, worsened air pollution, and heightened risks of vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue fever. These factors contribute to a range of health problems, spanning from cancer and heart disease to respiratory ailments and mental health issues.

# Increase in ocean surface temperatures to have far reaching consequences

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A significant increase in surface temperatures within the ocean, ranging from 1.4 to 3 degrees Celsius between 2020 and 2100 is expected to have far-reaching consequences, including pushing the Indian Ocean into a state of near-permanent heatwaves. This will intensify cyclones, affect the monsoon, and lead to a rise in sea levels, a new study led by Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) has flagged concerns. It showed that marine heatwaves (periods of abnormally high ocean temperatures) are projected to increase from 20 days per year (during 1970-2000) to 220-250 days per year, pushing the tropical Indian Ocean into a basin-wide near-permanent heatwave state by the end of the 21st century. Marine heat waves cause habi-



at destruction due to coral bleaching, seagrass destruction, and loss of kelp forests, affecting the fisheries sector adversely. They also lead to the rapid intensification of cyclones. The rapid warming in the Indian Ocean is not limited to the surface. The heat content of the Indian Ocean, from the surface to a depth of 2,000 meters, is currently increasing

at the rate of 4.5 zetta-joules per decade and is predicted to increase at a rate of 16-22 zetta-joules per decade in the future, the study titled "Future projection for the tropical Indian Ocean" said. "The future increase in heat content is comparable to adding the energy equivalent of one Hiroshima atomic bomb detonation every second, all day, every day, for a

decade," Koll said. The maximum warming will occur in the northwestern Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea, while there will be reduced warming off the Sumatra and Java coasts. Amid the accelerated ocean warming, the seasonal cycle of surface temperatures is projected to shift, which could increase extreme weather events over the Indo-Pacific region. Sea surface temperatures above 28 degrees Celsius are generally conducive to deep convection and cyclogenesis. Heavy rainfall events and extremely severe cyclones have already increased since the 1950s and are projected to increase further with increasing ocean temperatures, the authors said. The increased ocean heat could also lead to a rise in sea level. Thermal expansion of water contributes to more than half of the sea level rise in the Indian Ocean, which is larger than the contribution from glacier and sea-ice melt-

ing. The Indian Ocean Dipole, a phenomenon that affects the monsoon and cyclone formation, is also predicted to change. The frequency of extreme dipole events is predicted to increase by 66 per cent whereas the frequency of moderate events is to decrease by 52 per cent by the end of the 21st century. The authors of the study predicted that ocean acidification will intensify, with surface pH decreasing from a pH above 8.1 to below 7.7 by the end of the century. Surface chlorophyll and net primary productivity are also predicted to decline. Bordered by 40 countries, and home to a third of the global population, changes to climate in the Indian Ocean region have major societal and economic impacts. Currently, the Indian Ocean and its surrounding countries stand out globally as the region with the highest risk of natural hazards, with coastal communities vulnerable to weather and climate extremes.





# SP has accepted defeat even before end of contest: Yogi

PNS ■ BUDAUN

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Sunday that the Samajwadi Party had accepted defeat even before the conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections. He remarked: "The frequent changes in candidates by the Samajwadi Party indicates that the party has accepted defeat even before the elections are over." Taking a dig at the Congress and SP, Yogi Adityanath said that those who challenged divine power were destined to fall, adding that the SP had turned the Lok Sabha elections into a mockery. Referring to the Congress manifesto while addressing a public meeting in Bilsa, Budaun, the chief minister said, "Congress is working on hidden agendas against the nation. Former prime ministers used to hesitate to visit Ayodhya. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the first prime minister who visited Ayodhya and witnessed 'pran pratishtha' of Ram Lalla in his magnificent temple after 500 years." He also urged people to support the BJP candidate and regional president Durvijay Shakya. Taking a jibe at SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shival Singh Yadav, Chief Minister Yogi remarked, "It appears that even the 'chacha' has realised that it is time to step back, while the 'bhatija' has stumbled even before the start. This is evident in Shahjahanpur, Rampur and Meerut.



However, the public knows their tactics and will not succumb to it." Chief Minister Yogi stated that with the connection of the Ganga Expressway, this region was becoming a part of the industrial development process. "Before 2014, terrorist activities used to occur in India, and Pakistan would celebrate, while the Indian government remained silent. Today, even if a firecracker goes off in Pakistan, it starts giving explanations because it knows when and where a surgical strike might occur," Yogi added. "Presently, the country is establishing new milestones of security, and prosperity with highways, expressways and development. A long series of welfare schemes for the poor is available to the public," Yogi added. The chief minister stated that previous

governments played with faith. "People from the Congress used to say that Ram and Krishna never existed. Today, after 500 years, the anticipation has ended, and Ram Lalla is now enshrined in his magnificent temple," he said. "We will honour the great personalities and faith in every district. We have started with Kashi and Ayodhya, and after Braj, Budaun is also on the list," he pointed out. Chief Minister Yogi cautioned people against the Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, alleging that they had a hidden agenda against India. "They are planning to tamper with reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Backward Classes and are preparing to impose an inheritance tax on your property after surveying it," he stated. He mentioned, "We have tackled the mafia and goons. The SP did not utter a single word of condolence on the death of former chief minister Kalyan Singh but visited the home of a mafia to read the Fatiha upon his death." Yogi emphasised that people must cast their votes for a self-reliant and developed India. On this occasion, Union minister BN Verma, BJP regional president and candidate from Budaun Durvijay Shakya, BJP state vice-president Dinesh Sharma, MP Sanghamitra Maurya, MLA Bilsa Harishh Shukla, MLC Vagish Pathak, MLA Mahesh Gupta, Rajiv Kumar Singh, Vimal Krishna present.

## We are alive as PM Modi got vaccines for us during COVID pandemic: Fadnavis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday appealed to people to put aside other issues and vote for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he kept everyone alive by making vaccines available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fadnavis sought votes over vaccines during his addresses at Madha and Barshi towns in 32Solapur district. The senior BJP leader held his first rally at Barshi, part of the Osmanabad parliamentary constituency, where Archana Patil of the NCP is contesting against incumbent MP Omraje Nimbalkar of the Shiv Sena (UBT). Madha falls under the Madha Lok Sabha constituency, where the BJP has renominated its sitting MP Ranjitsinh Nimbalkar against Dhairyasheel Mohite Patil of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP). Dhairyasheel resigned from the BJP earlier this month. "Put aside other issues and vote for Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he kept us alive during the pandemic. He took the initiative and under his leadership, India not only produced its own vaccine but also supplied it to other

countries," said Fadnavis. He was referring to India's 'Vaccine Maitri' programme under which anti-COVID jabs were supplied to several nations. The country was not in a strong position before Modi came to power, he said. "Earlier, people from Pakistan could easily come here and carry out terror attacks. The then prime minister would go to the US to complain about Pakistan, but nothing would happen. After Modi came to power, we retaliated by surgical strike and carried out airstrike to send out a strong message," he said. Today, India is prospering while Pakistan is heading towards bankruptcy, Fadnavis said. Asked about Dhairyasheel, a BJP ex-district general secretary and nephew of former deputy chief minister Vijaysinh Mohite Patil, Fadnavis said, "When Sharad Pawar had almost ended his (Vijaysinh's) political career, we (BJP) stood behind him. It is up to Mohite Patil now to decide the future course of action. I do not think all the members of the Mohite Patil family agree with Dhairyasheel's decision."

## Future of Kerala LDF convenor hangs in balance

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The life of EP Jayarajan, LDF convenor of the Left Democratic Front who is also the second senior-most leader of the CPI(M) is in danger as his party has shunned him from almost all positions. Though he has not been officially declared as persona non grata, the CPI(M) has made it known through some of the leaders that Jayarajan's days as LDF convenor is almost over. The CPI's state secretary Binoy Viswam had the audacity to declare that Jayarajan had erred in meeting BJP leader Prakash Jawadekar and he should face action for the same. The general impression is that Viswam would not have made such a statement without a prodding by CPI(M) leadership. The controversy erupted on election day (April 26) when BJP's Alappuzha candidate Sobha Surendran declared that a top CPI(M) leader was likely to cross over to the Hindutva party disgusted with the goings on in his party. Though she did not give the name of the CPI(M) leader, it was declared by K. Sudhakaran, the KPCC chief and Kannur Lok Sabha candidate that Jayarajan was the person who was in talks with Jawadekar. Jayarajan is already on record stating that the BJP had fielded some of the best candidates in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Being an election day, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and CPI(M) secretary M. V. Govindan said that there was nothing unusual in the LDF convenor meeting the BJP leader. But by Saturday. The same Vijayan and Govindan changed the tune and came down heavily on Jayarajan. It is an open secret that Jayarajan and Govindan do not see to eye on any issues as the former had hoped that he would be appointed party secretary after the demise of Kodyeri Balakrishnan. But Pinarayi Vijayan preferred Govindan, a side kick who would always toe his line of thinking.

## FIR against couple for sharing voting booth video on social media

PNS ■ ALIGARH

An FIR has been registered against Yogesh Gautam and his wife on behalf of the Inspector of Bannadevi police station for making video of the EVM and making it viral. According to this case, they went to the Indian Public School center in Sarsaul and casted their vote on EVM and made a video of it. After this, they made that video viral by posting it on his Facebook ID. Despite the Election Commission's ban on taking photos and videos of EVMs during voting, people are not agreeing to do so. Incidents of taking such photos and

making videos have also taken place in Aligarh city. In this case, independent candidate Pandit Keshav Dev of Anti-Corruption Army has raised the demand for cancellation of elections. A memorandum has also been given to ADM city in this regard. It is alleged that both of them have violated the confidentiality of the voting process. This is influencing the voters without having any impact on the voting and is in the category of crime. This is also a violation of the code of conduct. Inspector Pankaj Kumar Mishra has confirmed the registration of the case.

## BJP will neither remove quota nor allow anyone to do so, says Shah

PTI ■ KASGANJ/MAINPURI/ETAWAH (UP)

The BJP will neither remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday, calling it a "Modi guarantee". Opposition parties have repeatedly claimed that the BJP's call for "abki baar 400 paar" is aimed at winning 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections to have the numbers in Parliament to scrap quotas for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Speaking at a rally in support

of Rajveer Singh, the BJP candidate from Etah-Kasganj, Shah alleged that the opposition parties ignored people from backward communities, who were granted their rights by Narendra Modi after he became prime minister. Targeting Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets 400 seats, it will remove reservation. I want to say that we had a full majority for two terms but Narendra Modi is a supporter of reservation." "I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither will the BJP remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so," Shah

said. The home minister also hit out at the opposition for keeping the Ram temple issue "hanging" and said the public has to choose between "those who opened fire at karsevaks and those who built the Ram temple". Attacking opposition party leaders for not attending the Ram temple consecration ceremony, Shah said in Kasganj, "The people who did not go to the consecration ceremony, they know that they are the people who shot at karsevaks." He asserted that there are two groups to choose from — "one that fired shots at Ram bhakts and one that built the Ram temple".

<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Subhash Malik having address at 5827 DLF Phase -IV Gurgaon-122009 Haryana with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 21 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Subhash Malik calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Subhash Malik within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Sheel Kapoor having address at E-A-1-40-Second Floor Inderpuri New Delhi-110060 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 6 years and rent due for the last 2 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Sheel Kapoor calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Sheel Kapoor within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Saroj Khanna having address at W-10 (Ground Floor) Rajouri Garden New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 21 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Saroj Khanna calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Saroj Khanna within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>
---	--	---

<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Yatin Wadhwa having address at J 51 Arya Smaj Road Uttam Nagar Delhi-110059 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 11 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Yatin Wadhwa calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Yatin Wadhwa within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Sushant Muttreja having address at 4A-51 Block Old Rajinder Nagar New Delhi-110060 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 8 years and rent due for the last 6 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Sushant Muttreja calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Sushant Muttreja within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Prem Kumar Popli having address at H No C-161 Mansarovar Garden New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 7 years and rent due for the last 5 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Prem Kumar Popli calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Prem Kumar Popli within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Pallak Bahl having address at 13A-1 Block 13A Old Rajinder Nagar Near Water Tank Delhi-110060 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 , Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 6 years and rent due for the last 4 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Pallak Bahl calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Pallak Bahl within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Neelam Saraf having address at Hno. 1-9 17-I G Floor Rajouri Garden New Delhi-110027 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 , Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 20 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Neelam Saraf calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Neelam Saraf within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Neelu Anand having address at C-126, Block - C, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi - 110015 with Block - F, Kirti Nagar Branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at F-55, Block - F, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi - 110015 remains un-operated for the last 10 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Neelu Anand calling upon her to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if the said locker is not operated by Ms. Neelu Anand within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Maninder Kaur having address at F-6 Model Town New Delhi-110007 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2, Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 8 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Maninder Kaur calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Maninder Kaur within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Isha Batra having address at 6-3 B-2 East Azad Nagar Lane No-14 Delhi-110051 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2, Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 6 years and rent due for the last 4 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Isha Batra calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Isha Batra within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>
<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Surjeet Singh Viroi having address at CO Room No-101 25-33 1st Floor East Partel Nagar New Delhi-110008 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 7 years and rent due for the last 2 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Surjeet Singh Viroi calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Surjeet Singh Viroi within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Surinder Kumar Mago having address at F-181 2nd Floor Mansarovar Garden New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 19 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Surinder Kumar Mago calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Surinder Kumar Mago within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Rajeev Chauhan having address at B-63 G-F Ashoka Enclave Part-2 Safron Public School Faridabad-121001 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 9 years and rent due for the last 5 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Rajeev Chauhan calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Rajeev Chauhan within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Rakesh Sharma having address at 53-15 Old Rajinder Nagar Rajender Nagar New Delhi-110060 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 9 years and rent due for the last 1 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Rakesh Sharma calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Rakesh Sharma within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Ms. Rekha Jain having address at P K Plastic Dr Complex C-24 Mansarovar Garden New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 ,main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 8 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Ms. Rekha Jain calling upon her to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and she is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Ms. Rekha Jain within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Harpal Singh Alhuwalia having address at B-209 Mansarovar Garden New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 , Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 18 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Harpal Singh Alhuwalia calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Harpal Singh Alhuwalia within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Chamkaur Singh having address at NU Woodland 2-73 Timber Market Kirti Nagar Near Main Road New Delhi-110015 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2, Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 6 years and rent due for the last 2 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Chamkaur Singh calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Chamkaur Singh within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>	<p><b>kotak</b> Kotak Mahindra Bank</p> <p><b>NOTICE</b></p> <p>Locker hired by Mr. Bimal Parsad Sharma having address at C-40 Tagore Garden Ext New Delhi-110027 with Kirti Nagar WHS branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at 85/1 Block 2 , Main Road , Kirti Nagar, New Delhi -110027 remains un-operated past 9 years and rent due for the last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Bimal Parsad Sharma calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned un-served and he is not contactable. It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Bimal Parsad Sharma within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on July 29, 2024 at around 12 p.m</p>





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Orange hills

Nainital is just one example of ongoing forest fires damaging the fragile ecosystem in Uttarakhand

Historically, Uttarakhand is somehow a little more prone than other hill States in India to the scourge of frequent forest fires, especially in summers. Otherwise famous for its breathtaking beauty and lush greenery, the State has of late again experienced a series of jungle blazes: To give an idea of the seriousness of the situation, more than 500 have been reported since January and one almost every hour in the past 24 hours. The latest incident has struck perilously close to the inhabited areas in Nainital, gutting 108 ha of forest land and sounding alarm bells for the residents and authorities alike. With the situation worsening, the Army and IAF have been pressed into action to aid containment efforts. These fires, often man-made to clear dead vegetation or fuelled by natural friction amid dry vegetation and exacerbated by strong winds, pose a significant threat to the fragile ecosystem. Despite concerted containment efforts, the inferno has spread its tendrils closer to human population. The IAF helicopters equipped



with water-spraying capabilities are deployed to douse the flames, offering a crucial advantage in reaching inaccessible terrain. Additionally, Army personnel are working on ground to create firebreaks and prevent further spread. As for the bright side of this challenge, the wildfires have brought out the best in humans — cooperating with authorities and fighting it together. Amid the suffocating chaos and burning uncertainty, the spirit of community resilience has shone brightly. Local residents, alongside volunteers and NGOs, have rallied together to support firefighting efforts and offer assistance to those affected.

From food and shelter to lending a helping hand in evacuation efforts, the collective response has underscored the strength of solidarity in the face of adversity. However, these forest fires carry grave environmental implications. The loss of precious flora and fauna, coupled with the release of harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate future fire outbreaks. Strengthening forest management practices, implementing early warning systems and fostering community awareness are paramount in safeguarding the region's biodiversity and mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires. It is about time that a comprehensive policy was framed to fight the wildfire menace. The Uttarakhand Government must draw from the US experiences in California, where such fires are frequent but they manage them rather well and swiftly with an early warning system, besides a mechanism for controlled burns. As the battle against the Nainital forest fire rages on, it serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural ecosystems as also the resilience of the human spirit. With the combined efforts of authorities, armed forces and local communities, there is hope that the flames will soon be extinguished. However, the aftermath of this crisis should serve as a catalyst for concerted action towards building a more resilient and sustainable future for Uttarakhand and beyond.

### PICTALK



Veerakumars' gather to participate in the the Karaga festival at Sri Dharmarajana Swamy Temple, in Bengaluru

# Pakistan paying for its misplaced priorities



BHOPINDER SINGH

Ambassador Asif Durrani acknowledges the Pak Government's shortcomings in handling the Afghanistan situation and underscores a reality check for Islamabad's foreign policy

Pakistan's Special Representative on Afghanistan, Ambassador Asif Durrani, conceded the grave reality of the Pakistani Government's abject failure in Afghanistan. Speaking at a conference titled, "Pakistan in the Emerging Geopolitical Landscape", the diplomat accepted that the ensuing price of the flared tensions along the Durand Line far exceeded the human and financial cost of all the wars with India, put together!

Cold and frightening statistics like the loss of over 80,000 lives in the so-called 'War on Terror' which Islamabad joined in 2001 (including 8000 security personnel) and an estimated economic loss of \$150 billion—the reality check of what ought to worry Pakistan, i.e., between its traditional enemy across the Line-of-Control, or the one across the Durand Line—couldn't have been clearer. To make matters worse for Islamabad, it isn't even close to the end of its miseries as the deadly attacks by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have shot up by 65% and the accompanying suicide attacks by 500%! In such a scenario to persist with India as the 'enemy number 1' is not only to suffer from an acute sense of Ostrich syndrome, but also to refuse the hard lessons of Karma i.e., what goes around, comes around.

The fixation with India owes itself to the wounds of the partition and the desperate need of various institutions to have an 'enemy' to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the citizenry e.g., clergy, military, politicians etc., as also, as to defend the flawed 'two-nation theory' that ostensibly rationalises Pakistan. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 exposed the hollowness and amorality of a nation created in the name of religion - the current equation with Afghanistan further exposes the untenability of a relationship based on co-religionism. That religion can never be the basis of nationhood or indeed ensure a 'brotherly relation' (as insincerely claimed) with a neighbour, is further proved. At the end of the day, what matters is, 'intent' or neat. Over time, intent has an



inevitable way of revealing itself that cannot be suppressed by homilies of co-religiousity. As the speech by Ambassador Durrani accepted, "After the withdrawal of NATO forces, it was hoped that peace in Afghanistan would bring peace to the region. However, such expectations were short-lived". Anyone with a modicum of understanding about history (especially about Afghanistan, the home to many 'Great Games') ought to have known that to 'control' the narrative in Afghanistan was not just impossible and impractical, but also counter-productive. The worst-kept secret of nurturing a desire to have 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan could not be hidden even from its creation, the Afghan Taliban. While the Afghans had accepted the support and infrastructure afforded by Pakistani regimes of all hues and shades since the late 1970's — to expect the proud Afghan (even a Pak-created Taliban) to toe Islamabad's line blindly was an affront to the cultural-civilisational identity of an Afghan. Not only did the Taliban Government bolt out from the shackles of controls, 'advisories' and condescending platitudes from Islamabad, but it knowingly harboured and supported its ideological offshoot i.e., the Pak-facing Tehreek-e-Taliban

“THE PROJECT OF DEMONISING INDIA BY THE PAKISTANIS HAS FAILED SPECTACULARLY AMONGST THE CONSERVATIVE AFGHANS, AS EVEN THEY HARBOUR A RATHER WARM PERCEPTION OF THE INDIANS, AS OPPOSED TO THAT OF THE PAKISTANIS

Pakistan (TTP) fighters, who attack Pakistan with impunity and deadly consequences. A grim observation of the situation suggests that the attacks on Pakistan are not just a phenomenon afflicting disaffected Pakistani folks across the Afghan side, but that the "worrying aspect is the participation of Afghan nationals in these attacks". Basically, either as genuinely motivated or even as trained mercenaries, Afghan nationals are attacking Pakistan! The project of demonising India by the Pakistanis has failed spectacularly amongst the conservative Afghans, as even they harbour a rather warm perception of the Indians, as opposed to that of the Pakistanis. At the end of the day, the difference in sovereign intent emanating from Islamabad, versus those emanating from Delhi, has surfaced. Beyond certain constraints mandated by their self-invested image, ideology and inert conservatism, the language used by the Taliban Government officials bears a stark contrast, from the one that was imagined when the US/NATO forces abandoned Kabul and the Taliban stormed into Kabul. Today, given the 'dark' investments made by the Pakistani State it finds itself in an awkward and inextricable position. Try hard as it might, the

Pakistanis are struggling to undo and trace back the steps that it took to create the prevailing environment, infrastructure and instinct in the region. As Ambassador Durrani lamented, "Afghanistan has become a permanent fixture in Pakistan's regional paradigm for over four decades". Therefore, all support or otherwise to Pakistan is seen from the lens of Afghanistan. Ironically, Pakistani complaints about the situation with Afghanistan fall on deaf ears as the global community attributes much of what went wrong with the Afghan storyline, to the Pakistanis themselves. In some sense, it is a 'cry wolf' situation for the Pakistanis and there simply aren't too many takers or sympathisers of the Pakistani woes. A deeper introspection would reveal the rot in the thinking of the Pakistani system set in 1947 when it thought that religion was to be its trump card. History is instructive, that religion can never be a basis of Statehood for any moral and sustainable nation. Both Bangladesh and Afghanistan discredit the 'two-nation theory' (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SC UPHOLDS EVMs

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Supreme Court rejects 100 per cent VVPAT verification plea", published on April 27, this is my response. The Supreme Court has rightly reaffirmed its faith in the working of EVMs and refused the return of ballot papers. They seem to be satisfied with several safeguards and stringent checks which have been an integral part of EVM functioning. It is also a welcome move by the court that they have now given number 2 and 3 placed candidates an option to check and verify 5 per cent microchips per assembly segment so that they remain fully satisfied. One additional burden the Election Commission has to make is to also store symbol loading units for 45 days in addition to EVMs. Now hopefully this EVM issue should be closed for good and the opposition must create a narrative which resonates with the voters. The ruling party has given a lot of opportunities to the opposition where the former could have been put on the mat but the latter failed to do so. There are still 5 phases to go in the current elections and the opposition would do better to channel their energy in the right direction and highlight BJP's negative points than keep crying over EVMs.

Bal Govind | Noida

### JAMMU ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Stage set for phase II LS Polls", published on April 25, this is my response. The second phase of the Lok Sabha elections is completed now. The EVMs had made it captured the fate of Jammu as well. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are specifically annoyed with the governance of J&K as a Union Territory. The bigger mandate of J&K so disclosed appears to be extremely annoying with the BJP the people want to topple the UT administration to put in place proper Statehood.

### No moral high ground for India or the US



Apropos the editorial, "All is well", published on April 27, this is my response. Neither the US nor India can claim to be on the moral high ground to point an accusing finger at each other. The regularly occurring deaths of Indian students in the US are as much a blot on that nation as are the deaths of hundreds of innocent Manipuris in the State of Manipur. India's response to the allegations made by the USA has been rather dismissive because we all know the truth about Manipur. The US apart, even the Opposition parties of India had raised a quarrel over the situation in Manipur and rightly so. Therefore, for India to say that the US report is "deeply biased" and reflects a "significant misunderstanding of the ground realities" is to turn a blind eye to the facts. Both countries need to introspect and take measures to set their own house in order instead of indulging in a provocative blame game.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

The hope of Congress restoration is high along with the National Conference & PDP party compared to the Bhartiya Janta Party. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are anxiously waiting for this very moment. Hope the design will be fulfilled soon and very soon Jammu and Kashmir will enjoy complete Statehood like other Indian States.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

### STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Madam — In every domain, women are enchanting their presence. The inclusion of women in the decision-making process is their fundamental right and it is also pivotal for sustainable development. If women have significant representation, We will attain legal parity in economic opportunities and also unleash the benefits and economic progressions linked with this assortment. Also, they will influence voter's opinions, mobilise support and actively participate in the electoral process. A

paradigm shift of the Government's strong focus on women-led development, going beyond women-centric, represents a key pillar of India's progress. The Government is promoting women's empowerment by implementing a host of schemes, like, Skill Upgradation and Mahila Coir Yojana, Women Scientists Scheme, PM Mudra Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and many more. On top of that The Women's Reservation Bill passed by the parliament, gave women a significant voice in the Lok Sabha and State assemblies. In 2024, the launch of the Alliance for Global Good-Equity and Equality, focus on investing in women with the theme for International Women's Day 2024 - "Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress", shows that Indian leadership is now gaining global recognition for women's empowerment.

Apurva Garg | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Political parties must prioritise environmental preservation

Political leadership must prioritise sustainability and combating plastic pollution to safeguard ecosystems and human health



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

It's election time in India and various political parties vie for their space in the hearts of the public. Even when political parties give multiple offers, including providing sustainable living in their manifestos, there is no concrete measure to tackle issues affecting our planet. Even for the few who speak about the environment, the vision is for the future, not immediate. What we want is a manifesto that speaks about protecting our planet the moment it comes to power. Every political party stresses developmental politics. But what is the use of development if our planet's status is in a dilemma? The climate is changing; glaciers and the water table are receding and water scarcity is severe in parts of the country. We haven't devised a concrete step in managing our garbage, even in our capital city. Is it a lack of scientific knowledge? We have one CSIR lab exclusively working on the environment and many other research institutions working on similar lines. Still, we fail in this? Is it a lack of political will? Nobody knows the actual reason behind this. Every



part of the planet suffers from anthropogenic activities during this Anthropocene period.

In the electioneering process, political parties also create lots of garbage containing lots of plastic materials. During elections, political parties often use a variety of promotional materials such as banners, posters, flyers and flags, many of which are made of plastic or contain plastic components. Political rallies, public events and gatherings organised by political parties often generate significant amounts of waste, including plastic cups, plates and other disposable items. Improper waste management practices at these events can result in plastic litter ending up in the environment. Why can't the Government ban plastic from its production source? After manufacturing and selling to the vendors, for namesake, the official makes some per-

iodic visits and fines poor vendors. It's like keeping sweets near a diabetic patient and telling him not to touch them. Plastic pollution has significantly threatened ecosystems, wildlife and human health worldwide. Plastic pollution in oceans is a well-documented problem with devastating effects on marine life. Sea turtles, whales, seabirds and fish often mistake plastic debris for food or become entangled in plastic waste, leading to injury or death. Additionally, plastic fragments, known as microplastics, are ingested by smaller organisms and can bioaccumulate up the food chain, posing risks to human health. Coral reefs, often called the "rainforests of the sea," are highly sensitive ecosystems that provide habitat for numerous marine species. Plastic pollution can smother coral reefs, blocking sunlight and inhibiting coral growth. Chemicals released by plastic degradation can also harm coral health, contributing to reef degradation and loss. Political parties can influence public opinion and behaviour through messaging

and advocacy efforts. Parties that prioritise environmental issues and promote sustainable practices can help raise awareness about the harms of plastic pollution and encourage individuals and communities to take action. They should teach their followers to follow clean environmental practices in their party functions and their daily lives. In India, political parties have the power to shape policies and promote initiatives that influence people's attitudes and behaviours toward plastics. So, they should take responsibility.

We don't have decades to wait for the results. Already, the global temperature has reached its threshold. Any further increase may cause unforeseen consequences on the life on this planet. We need a political mindset to change our attitude towards plastics and the environment immediately. It will be good if we always remember that we don't have a 'planet B' to sustain humanity.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

## THE CRISIS OF SELF-IDENTITY

Discovering the self brings change, peace and liberation



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, almost every country in the world has been putting in hard efforts to make a Better World that is free from all kinds of fear and insecurities and is safe for all. However, in this whole exercise, we must not forget the fact that the breakthrough in man's efforts to bring change comes only when he knows his real identity. The present world crisis, which is generally known as the crisis of values, is in fact, a deep crisis of self-identity. This crisis of values also has resulted from the loss of the knowledge of the real identity of the self. While man has discovered many 'lost continents' or land masses on the globe, this continent of the self has yet to be discovered or rediscovered by all of us. Thus man has first to be made aware of the truth that he has, in him, a certain potential of divine qualities or a core of human values and that these qualities or values, within him, have gone deep down in the sea of the Subconscious and the Unconscious Mind and have now to be brought again to the surface, into the light and have to be used as the keyboard for actions. Man has also to be given a realisation of the truth that, with the cremation or burial of the dead body, man's all deeds good or bad done by him during his lifetime, or the abilities and qualities acquired by him over some time, are not all lost.

Neither does man's good actions go unrewarded forever nor does he go unpunished for his bad actions. Unless and until man realises that, in truth, he is an eternal being, a soul or a being-of-light and that so are other beings, his outlook and his attitude towards all others does not undergo a total change. When, however, he realises his real identity, he takes a new 'mental and spiritual birth' so to say and then an improvement in his self and his relationships with others takes place automat-



ically and naturally even as day follows night. So, we may adopt whatever strategy we think is suitable for a particular country or a group of people but let us keep in mind that, sooner or later, we have to give to all those who come in touch with us the knowledge of the real identity of self, for without this knowledge, there is no going nearer to our goal of a better world.

Today we all identify ourselves with the body that we have acquired because we are unaware of the immortal entity called 'soul' which resides within us and functions through our body. This ignorance about the existence of the soul thus results in 'body-consciousness' or a worldly approach towards life, as a result of which throughout our life we struggle to improve our condition of life without understanding the fact as to why the physical and mental conditions and environments of two individuals differ widely right from the time of their birth. We get baffled by human sufferings & untimely deaths on a mass scale caused by natural calamities, terrorism, violence and wars due to which we constantly fear for our death all the time.

In this whole merry-go-round, we fail to realise that unless these basic aspects of life are rightly understood, the body-conscious approach is bound to be there. Considering one's physical existence as the 'be all and end all' of everything results in man's adopting wrong values in life which in turn leads to his committing wrong acts and consequently causes suffering to him. No wonder, despite striving hard, he is unable to avoid sorrow and suffering in life. Hence to live a peaceful, contented, happy and liberated life, proper knowledge of one's real self i.e. the soul, its functioning and its role in the world drama is a 'must'.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist; views are personal)

## Market-oriented gig skill sets under focus

As the job landscape evolves, the focus is now on fostering market-driven skill sets to meet the demands of a changing workforce



DINESH SOOD



In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving job market, employers are not just interested in hiring candidates with degrees from prestigious institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), they now prioritise hiring candidates with specific skill sets.

Despite the widespread recognition of IITs for academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities, recent worrisome reports have revealed that they are not delivering as per their ranking and perception. Every year among thousands of students who dream to get admission in IIT's, only 20-25 per cent of them remain lucky charm to clear the JEE (Joint Entrance Exam) advanced process to get admission while pursuing their academic excellence and coveted placement opportunities every year they look forward to the placement season with an eye on big-ticket jobs.

However, The 2024 placement season is described as "lacklustre" by IIT students. This is a worrying situation in IIT-Bombay, which is ranked third among engineering institutes in India by NIRF. According to the Global IIT Alumni Support Group, nearly 36% of students were unable to secure jobs for the 2024 placements. Although IIT-Bombay contested this report, stating that only 6.1% of students remained unplaced, the situation is still concerning.

The Global IIT Alumni Support Group data shows that nearly 30-40% of IIT students are still unplaced in the top-ranked 8 older IITs like Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur and others, while around 50-60% of students are still unplaced in the 15 newer IITs like BHU (Varanasi), Ropar and others. The unemployment crisis in India is par-



NEARLY 83 PER CENT OF THOSE UNEMPLOYED IN INDIA ARE YOUNG AND AMONG THESE UNEMPLOYED YOUNG INDIANS, NEARLY 66 PER CENT ARE EDUCATED

ticularly acute among educated youth. The cost of an engineering degree remains at Rs 8-10 lakh, yet the placement rate remains around 30%. Furthermore, there is an influx of MBA degree holders entering the market, even though the demand has dropped by 55% this year. This raises the question of the value of a college/university degree.

Being highly educated is no guarantee of employment in India, as the International Labor Organisation (ILO) report reveals. Nearly 83% of those unemployed in India are young and among these unemployed young Indians, nearly 66% are educated. According to the ILO report, the "youth unemployment rate has increased with the level of education, with the highest rates among those with a graduate degree or higher." On the other hand, those without university degrees or even school dropouts have a higher employment rate.

Several highly educated youths set an example by adopting odd entrepreneurship and proudly titled it MBA's Chaiwalas and Chatwalas.

Despite the promise of creating 100 million jobs through the flagship "Make in India" initiative, the expected job creation did not materialise in the last 10 years. Raghuram Rajan, the former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, has emphasised the need to make the workforce more employable and create jobs. Every year, around 7-8 million young

Indians enter the workforce, but many remain unemployed.

It is a proven fact that our youth with higher education degrees are not well-skilled. One of the main reasons why skills are more important than higher degrees is because they are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills needed to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. On the other hand, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, may be able to hit the ground running. It is essential to note that having relevant skills is more crucial than having higher degrees since skills are directly applicable to the job at hand.

A candidate with a degree may have a broad understanding of a subject, but without the specific skills required to perform the job, they may struggle to succeed. Conversely, a candidate with the right set of skills, even if they don't have a higher degree, can hit the ground running and perform exceptionally well. For example, gig skill courses like digital marketing and beauty-wellness are available for around Rs 30 to 50 thousand and have a placement scope of over 90 per cent.

A gig economy offers a shot: The gig economy in India is vibrant, skill-driven and bucking the unemployed youths. According to a report by gig work platform Taskmo (which has over 7,50,000 gig workers registered) youth participation in the gig economy

has increased an astounding eightfold between 2019 and 2022, with most of the young people coming from Tier-I and Tier-II cities. In 2022, a projection report by Niti Aayog on the gig economy predicted a higher demand for skilled gig workers in the future. Areas such as digital marketing, social media management, logistics, healthcare and beauty-wellness will be in high demand, reflecting the diverse needs of employers and the evolution of the job market. The gig workforce is expected to expand to 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2021-22.

It's fascinating to see that a professionally trained gig worker, such as a hairdresser, can earn more than an MBA or IITan's. Jawed Habib, a hair stylist expert entrepreneur, is an excellent example of this. With his global exposure, he's inspiring young people to envision beauty wellness as a profession of the future. It's important to note that having a higher degree is no longer the only way to get hired or advance in a career. Employers are increasingly looking for candidates with specific skills that are directly applicable to the job and can help the company succeed. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on market-driven gig skill sets.

(The writer is a co-founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), network member of India International Skill Centres; views expressed are personal.)

## Taiwan urges for stronger global health governance

Taiwan advocates for global health governance, urging inclusion and collaboration to ensure human rights

Despite not being a WHO member State, Taiwan emphasises the importance of contributing insights into pandemic management and learning from international best practices. Taiwan's proactive approach to pandemic response underscores its commitment to global health. Advocating for amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and inclusion in the pandemic agreement, Taiwan seeks to collaborate on monitoring, reporting and exchanging vital health data to enhance global health security. Additionally, Taiwan champions universal health coverage and humanitarian efforts to uphold the fundamental human right to health worldwide. The three years of



HSUEH JUI-YUAN

the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a terrible loss of life and exacerbated health inequalities. The global economy slumped and, worldwide, people's lives were affected. This experience demonstrated that the present global health governance framework is not effective in responding to threats to global health. Although COVID-19 is no longer labelled a public health emergency of international

concern (PHEIC) and trade and economic activity globally have returned to normal, the World Health Organisation (WHO) cautions against the threat of a Disease X pandemic. Therefore, countries across the globe must unite to bolster health governance.

WHO and many countries began reviewing response strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Weaknesses in the International Health Regulations (2005) as concerns managing this crisis were revealed. As a result, changes are afoot. Proposed revisions include enhanced surveillance, reporting and information sharing; improved response readiness; and revised criteria for declaring PHEICs. At the same time, there is vigorous debate around a new

pandemic agreement, which aims to craft a robust global pandemic governance framework grounded in accountability, transparency and equity. It may be approved at the 77th World Health Assembly.

As Taiwan is not a WHO member State, it cannot directly influence revisions to the International Health Regulations (2005) or the drafting of the pandemic agreement. Nevertheless, we remain greatly concerned about the content of and developments regarding these central documents.

We are eager to contribute our insights into pandemic management and learn from international best practices. Taiwan was the nation that initially identified the epidemic risk and promptly executed adap-

tive measures. Taiwan also proactively shared vital information with global partners and garnered public trust through a commitment to openness. We strongly endorse the passage and implementation of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005) and the pandemic agreement. We call on WHO to include Taiwan as a signatory to these documents.

We urge WHO to support Taiwan's inclusion in overseeing global health. Taiwan remains committed to participating based on the principles of professionalism, pragmatism and making contributions. Taiwan seeks to cooperate with WHO to remedy geographic gaps in global health security and to con-

struct a comprehensive global health framework.

The WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All has found that at least 140 countries recognise health as a fundamental human right in their constitutions. Despite this, many nations have not passed and implemented laws to ensure that their citizens have access to healthcare services. Taiwan has worked hard to reach universal health coverage and has consistently improved the quality of health care over the past few decades in line with WHO recommendations.

Taiwan has effectively integrated and allocated social welfare resources to enhance primary and oral health care for all, implement mental health programs and

strengthen the social safety net. Taiwan has put in place an agile and resilient healthcare system able to combat both communicable and non-communicable diseases. We are improving health for all individuals throughout their entire lives.

The theme for World Health Day 2024 is "My health, my right." This is a way to advocate for every individual, everywhere, to have access to quality health services, education and information, as well as to enjoy safe drinking water, clean air, good nutrition, quality housing, decent working and environmental conditions and freedom from discrimination. Through a public-private partnership, Taiwan has been contributing to global efforts to realise the

right to health in collaboration with partner countries and international organisations.

Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement. This would better empower Taiwan to collaborate with global partners to uphold the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The author is Minister of Health and Welfare Republic of China (Taiwan); views are personal.)



# Top Qatari official calls for Israel, Hamas to step up efforts for truce

AP ■ TEL AVIV

A senior Qatari official has urged both Israel and Hamas to show "more commitment and more seriousness" in cease-fire negotiations in interviews with Israeli media, as pressure builds on both sides to move toward a deal that would set Israeli hostages free and bring potential respite in the nearly 7-month-long war in Gaza. The interviews with liberal daily Haaretz and Israeli public broadcaster Kan were published and aired Saturday evening. They came as Israel still promises to invade Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah despite global concern for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians sheltering there, and as the sides are exchanging proposals surrounding a cease-fire deal.

Qatar, which hosts Hamas headquarters in Doha, has been a key intermediary throughout the Israel-Hamas war. Along with the US and Egypt, Qatar was instrumental in helping negotiate a brief halt to the fighting in November that led to the release of dozens of hostages. The sides have held numerous rounds of negotiations since, none of which produced an additional truce. In a sign of its frustration, Qatar earlier this month said it was reassessing its role as mediator.

In the interviews, Qatar's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Majed al-Ansari expressed disappointment in both Hamas and Israel, saying each side has made its decisions based on political interests and not with the good of civilians in mind. "We were hoping to see more commitment and more seriousness on both sides," he told Haaretz. He did not reveal details of the current state of the talks, other than to say they have "effectively stopped," with "both sides entrenched in their positions."

"If there is a renewed sense of commitment on both sides, I'm sure we can reach a deal," he said. The Israeli journalists conducted the interviews in

## French diplomat mediates Hezbollah-Israel ceasefire

AP ■ BEIRUT

French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné arrived in Lebanon Sunday as part of diplomatic attempts to broker a deescalation in the conflict on the Lebanon-Israel border. Séjourné was set to meet with United Nations peacekeeping forces in south Lebanon and with Lebanon's parliament speaker, army chief, foreign minister and caretaker prime minister.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has exchanged strikes near-daily with Israeli forces in the border region — and sometimes beyond — for almost seven months against the backdrop of Israel's war against Hezbollah ally Hamas in Gaza. Israeli strikes have killed more than 350 people in Lebanon, most of them fighters with Hezbollah and allied groups but also including more than 50 civilians.

Strikes by Hezbollah have killed 10 civilians and 12 soldiers in Israel. A French diplomatic official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to journalists

Qatar, which has no formal diplomatic ties with Israel. Relations between Qatar and Israel have been strained throughout the war, as some politicians in Israel, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have criticised Qatar for not putting enough pressure on Hamas. Israeli legislators have also cleared the way for the country to expel Al Jazeera, the Qatar-owned broadcaster. Al-Ansari's remarks came after an Egyptian delegation had discussed with Israeli officials a "new vision" for a prolonged cease-fire in Gaza, according to an Egyptian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to freely discuss the developments. But the progress seemed minimal. The Egyptian official

said the purpose of Séjourné's visit was to convey France's "fears of a war on Lebanon" and to submit an amendment to a proposal Paris had previously presented to Lebanon for a diplomatic resolution to the border conflict.

Western diplomats have brought forward a series of proposals for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Most of those would hinge on Hezbollah moving its forces several kilometres from the border, a beefed-up Lebanese army presence and negotiations for Israeli forces to withdraw from disputed points along the border where Lebanon says Israel has been occupying small patches of Lebanese territory since it withdrew from the rest of south Lebanon in 2000.

The previous French proposal would have involved Hezbollah withdrawing its forces 10 kilometres from the border.

Hezbollah has signalled willingness to entertain the proposals but has said there will be no deal in Lebanon before there is a cease-fire in Gaza.

Egypt's state-owned al-Qahera TV said the delegation would arrive on Monday. Negotiations earlier this month centred on a six-week cease-fire proposal and the release of 40 civilian and sick hostages held by Hamas in exchange for freeing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

There is growing international pressure for Hamas and Israel to reach a cease-fire deal and avert an Israeli attack on Rafah.

A letter penned by US President Joe Biden along with 17 other world leaders urged Hamas to release the hostages immediately. Hamas in recent days has released new videos of three hostages it holds, which appear to be meant to push Israel to make concessions. Israel meanwhile has massed dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles ahead of an expected offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population is seeking shelter.

The planned incursion has raised global alarm because of concerns over potential harm to civilians.

The troop buildup may also be a pressure tactic on Hamas in the truce talks. Israel sees Rafah as Hamas' last major stronghold and has vowed to attack the militant group there in its bid to destroy its military and governing capabilities.

The war was sparked by Hamas' attack on October 7 into southern Israel, which killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to Israeli authorities, who say another 250 people were taken hostage. Hamas and other groups are holding about 130 people, including the remains of about 30, Israeli authorities say. Israel's retaliatory assault on Hamas has killed more than 34,000 people, most of them women and children, according to health authorities in Gaza, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their tally. The Israeli military says it has killed at least 12,000 militants, without providing evidence to back the claim.

said Israeli officials are open to discussing establishing a permanent cease-fire in Gaza as part of the second phase of a deal.

"They showed willingness to do so but not commitment," the official said. Israel has refused to end the war until it defeats Hamas.

The second phase would start after the release of civilian and sick hostages, and would include negotiating the release of soldiers, he added. Senior Palestinian prisoners would be released and a reconstruction process launched. Senior Hamas official Basem Naim said in a message to The Associated Press that a delegation from the group will head to Cairo to discuss the latest proposals. He did not elaborate, but

# Sunak declines to rule out July election amid MP defection

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Sunday refused to categorically rule out a July general election amid a damaging defection by one of his Conservative Party MPs to the Opposition Labour Party, just days before local and mayoral elections in the country on May 2. Dan Poulter, a doctor and Central Suffolk and North Ipswich member of Parliament said he will switch his allegiance to the Opposition benches before standing down as a parliamentarian at the next election because he can no longer defend the Tory government's track record on the National Health Service (NHS). Against the backdrop of this latest embarrassment, Sunak was asked during a 'Sky News' interview that his repeated assertion of a general election in the "second half of this



year" could also mean July. "When it comes to a general election, I've been very clear about that multiple times, and again, I'm not going to say anything more than I've already said, I've been very clear about that," said Sunak, who was then pressed five times to rule out an election during what would be a peak summer

month for the UK. "You're going to try and draw whatever conclusion you want from what I say. I'm going to always try and say the same thing. You should just listen to what I said, [the] same thing I've said all year," he replied.

On the state-funded NHS, Sunak pointed to a drop in the waiting times for patients seeking treatment and pointed to some of his other successes as Prime Minister, such as bringing down inflation, hiking the defence budget and getting the Safety of Rwanda Bill passed through Parliament to start deporting illegal migrants to the east African country from later this year.

"And when the election comes, there'll be a clear choice because the Labour Party has tried to frustrate our Rwanda bill because they don't believe in stopping the boats; their eco-

nomics plan will put people's taxes up. They haven't said that they will invest more in our defence, and they certainly don't agree with reforming our welfare system to support people into work," said Sunak. He, however, admitted that "local elections are always difficult for incumbent parties" as the voting patterns on Thursday are widely seen as a precursor to what can be expected from a general election — which legally must take place by January 2025 at the latest. Meanwhile, some UK media reports suggest that keeping the threat of a summer election on the table — earlier than the expected October/November timeline — is being used as a tactic by Downing Street to deter any internal party rebellion against Sunak's leadership in the wake of potentially disastrous local poll results later this week.

## Funeral held for 20 soldiers killed in arms depot blast

AP ■ CAMBODIA

A funeral was held Sunday for 20 soldiers who died at an army base in southwestern Cambodia in a huge explosion of stored munitions that also wounded several others and damaged nearby houses. There has been no public explanation of what caused the Saturday afternoon blast at the base in Kompong Speu province, though there were no suggestions it was triggered deliberately. Defence Minister Tea Seha, representing Prime Minister Hun Manet, presided over the Buddhist funeral ceremony, which was attended by relatives of the victims and fellow soldiers. Cambodian flags covered the wooden coffins. A villager living nearby told The Associated Press on Sunday that he trembled after hearing the blast because he had never before experienced such a loud explosion. "When the explosion happened, I was fixing my house with some construction workers," said Chim Sothea.

"Suddenly there was a loud explosion, causing my house to shake and breaking tiles on my roof. They fell down but luckily they didn't fall inside the house." Images showed several badly damaged buildings on the base, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital. Other photos showed nearby houses with holes in their roofs. Four buildings on the base — three for storage and one work facility — were destroyed and several military vehicles damaged. Col Youeng Sokhon, an army officer at the site, said in a report to army chief Gen Mao Sophan. Another villager, who asked to be named only as Sopha, said the military closed the road to the base and "villagers were in a panic, seeking a safe place." He moved his family to his parent's home, farther away from the base. When he returned to his own house hours later, he found it undamaged but other villagers' houses had broken windows, doors and roofs, he

said. Cambodia, like many countries in the region, has been suffering from an extended heat wave, and the province where the blast took place registered a high of 39 C (102 F) on Saturday. While high temperatures normally can't detonate ammunition, they can degrade the stability of explosives over a period of time, with the risk that a single small explosion can set off a fire and a chain reaction. In March 2005, a nighttime blast at an arms depot in the northwestern provincial town of Battambang triggered an hours-long spray of shells and bullets, killing at least six people and causing panic. A 2014 report by the Swiss-based group Small Arms Survey highlighted the dangers of poorly stored or mishandled munitions, calling it a "global problem." It noted that from 1979 through 2013 there were more than 500 incidents involving unplanned explosions at munitions sites.

## Elon Musk makes surprise visit to Beijing; meets Premier Li Qiang

Beijing (PTI) On a surprise visit to Beijing amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China, billionaire Elon Musk on Sunday met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and discussed future expansion plans for his automobile.

Premier Li met with Musk, CEO of the US electric carmaker Tesla, in Beijing on Sunday, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The SpaceX and Tesla chief travelled to China at the invitation of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, meeting with CCPIT president Ren Hongbin to discuss further cooperation with the country, official broadcaster CTGN reported.

Musk is expected to meet senior Chinese officials at the State Council and "old friends" in Beijing, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

His Tesla has become a popular EV in China after he set up a USD seven billion factory in Shanghai which went into production in 2020.

Musk, who recently skipped a scheduled visit to India to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to firm up plans to open a Tesla factory in the country, is visiting Beijing when his Tesla market in China is threatened by the local EVs' increasing sales.

The Austin-based (Texas) Tesla has faced fierce competition from Chinese EV makers in the past few years. It has cut the prices of its Shanghai-made vehicles by up to six per cent to maintain its leading position in China's premium EV segment.

Grace Tao, Tesla's vice-president of external relations in China, wrote a commentary piece in China's official newspaper People's Daily on Friday, saying autonomous driving is a key growth driver for the country's new energy vehicle sector, arguing that the technology will hatch new business models such as robotaxis, a vision that Musk has embraced, the Post reported.

Musk's latest visit to China coincides with the 2024 Beijing Auto Show, which kicked off on Thursday.

## Biden pokes fun at Trump's age, critiques ahead of election

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden roasted his predecessor and political rival, Donald Trump and poked fun at his age at the annual dinner for Washington's political and media elites, saying "I am a grown man running against a six-year-old".

The White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) dinner on Saturday night provided the platform for Biden, 81, to continue his criticism of Trump, 77, with cutting humour. The high-profile event came against the backdrop of growing protests over Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

Of course, the 2024 election's in full swing and, yes, age is an issue: I'm a grown man running against a 6-year-old," Biden said in a roughly 10-minute speech, referring to former President Trump, whom he called "Sleepy Don." Speaking to an audience of nearly 3,000 journalists, celebrities and politicians, Biden added, "Age is the only thing we have in common. My vice president actually endorses me."

"Donald has had a few tough days lately. You might call it 'stormy weather,'" Biden said, an oblique reference to Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who claims she had an affair and received a hush-money payment in the days before the 2016 election, a deal at the centre of his New York trial.

The president went on to draw a contrast between his reelection campaign, which has ramped up since his State of the Union address last month, and that of Trump. Biden and Trump have both secured the delegates they need to win their respective party nominations in the November 5 presidential race, setting a rematch of their 2020 election showdown. After a slew of jokes targeting

Trump, Biden then took a more sombre tone to talk about his 2024 rival to the room of journalists, lawmakers and celebrities.

"The defeated former president has made no secret of his attack on our democracy. He said he wants to be a dictator on day one, and so much more. He tells supporters he is their revenge and retribution. When in God's name [have] you ever heard another president say something like that?" Biden asked, referring to Trump's recent remarks.

"We have to take this seriously. Eight years ago, you could've written off [that] it was just Trump talk, but no longer. Not after January 6," Biden said, calling on the audience to "move past the horse race numbers" and "focus on what's actually at stake."

Comedian Colin Jost followed Biden's remarks at the dinner on Saturday with a roast of the incumbent and other political figures in the room, offering comic relief against a backdrop of congressional tensions and conflict abroad. Demonstrators protested media coverage of the Israel-Hamas war and the administration's handling of the conflict near the Washington Hilton event space — and Biden notably didn't make direct reference to the protests or the conflict during his speech.

As journalists and celebrities entered the Washington Hilton, protesters accused them of cosigning the president's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, shouting, "Shame on you!" while urging them to speak out against the killing of journalists in Gaza. Since Hamas' October 7 attacks, at least 97 journalists — 92 of them Palestinian — have been killed in the region, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, a non-profit that has been tracking the death toll.

## Chants of 'shame on you' at White House dinner

AP ■ WASHINGTON

An election-year roast of President Joe Biden before journalists, celebrities and politicians at the annual White House correspondents' dinner Saturday butted up against growing public discord over the Israel-Hamas war, with large protests outside the event condemning both Biden's handling of the conflict and the Western news' media coverage of it.

In previous years, Biden, like most of his predecessors, has used the glitzy annual White House Correspondents' Association gala to needle media coverage of his administration and jab at political rivals, notably Republican rival Donald Trump.

With hundreds of protesters rallying against the war in Gaza outside the event and concerns over the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the perils for journalists covering the conflict, the war hung over this year's event.

"Shame on you!" protesters draped in the traditional



Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his wife, Evan Ryan, pose for photographers as they arrive at the annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner in Washington on Saturday.

Palestinian keffiyeh cloth shouted, running after men in tuxedos and suits and women

in long dresses who were holding clutch purses, as guests and other participants hurried

inside. Chants accused US journalists of undercovering the war and misrepresenting it. "Western media we see you, and all the horrors that you hide," crowds chanted at one point.

Other protesters lay sprawled motionless on the pavement, next to mock-ups of flak vests with "press" insignia.

Ralliers cried "Free, free Palestine." They cheered when at one point someone inside the Washington Hilton — where the dinner has been held for decades — unfurled a Palestinian flag from a top-floor hotel window.

Criticism of the Biden administration's support for Israel's 6-month-old military offensive in Gaza has spread through American college campuses, with students pitching encampments in an effort to force their universities to divest from Israel. Counterprotests back Israel's offensive and complain of anti-semitism.

Biden's speech before an expected crowd of nearly 3,000

## Houthi rebels claim downing US drone, release footage of wreckage

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Saturday claimed shooting down another of the US military's MQ-9 Reaper drones, airing footage of parts that corresponded to known pieces of the unmanned aircraft. The Houthis said they shot down the Reaper with a surface-to-air missile, part of a renewed series of assaults this week by the rebels after a relative lull in their pressure campaign over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. US Air Force Lt. Col. Bryon J. McGarry, a Defence Department spokesperson, acknowledged to The Associated Press on Saturday that "a US Air Force MQ-9 drone crashed in Yemen." He said an investiga-

tion was underway, without elaborating. The Houthis described the downing as happening Thursday over their stronghold in the country's Saada province.

Footage released by the Houthis included what they described as the missile launch targeting the drone, with a man off-camera reciting the Houthi's slogan after it was hit: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam." The footage included several close-ups on parts of the drone that included the logo of General Atomics, which manufactures the drone, and serial numbers corresponding with known parts made by the company. Since the Houthis

seized the country's north and its capital of Sanaa in 2014, the US military has lost at least five drones to the rebels counting Thursday's shootdown — in 2017, 2019, 2023 and this year. Reapers, which cost around USD 30 million apiece, can fly at altitudes up to 50,000 feet and have an endurance of up to 24 hours before needing to land.

The drone shootdown comes as the Houthis launch attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, demanding Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

## Pope Francis visits Venice

AP ■ VENICE

Venice has always been a place of contrasts, of breathtaking beauty and devastating fragility, where history, religion, art and nature have collided over the centuries to produce an otherworldly gem of a city. But even for a place that prides itself on its culture of unusual encounters, Pope Francis' visit Sunday stood out.

Francis travelled to the lagoon city to visit the Holy See pavilion at the Biennale contemporary art show and meet with the people who created it. But because the Vatican decided to mount its exhibit in Venice's women's prison, and invited inmates to collaborate with the artists, the whole project took on a far more complex meaning, touching on Francis' belief in the power of art to uplift and unify, and of the need to give hope and solidarity to society's

most marginalised. Francis hit on both messages during his visit, which began in the courtyard of the Giudecca prison where he met with the women inmates one by one. As some of them wept, Francis urged them to use their time in prison as a chance for "moral and material rebirth." "Paradoxically, a stay in prison can mark the beginning of something new, through the rediscovery of the unsuspected beauty in us and in others, as symbolised by the artistic event you are hosting and the project to which you actively contribute," Francis said.

Francis then met with Biennale artists in the prison chapel, decorated with an installation by Brazilian visual artist Sonia Gomes of objects dangling from the ceiling, meant to draw the viewer's gaze upward. He urged the artists to embrace the Biennale's theme this year

"Strangers Everywhere," to show solidarity with all those on the margins. "Art has the status of a city of refuge, a city that disobeys the regime of violence and discrimination in order to create forms of human belonging capable of recognising, including, protecting and embracing everyone," Francis said. The Vatican exhibit has turned the Giudecca prison, a former convent for reformed prostitutes, into one of the must-see attractions of this year's Biennale, even though to see it visitors must reserve in advance and go through a security check. It has become an unusual art world darling that greets visitors at the entrance with Maurizio Cattelan's wall mural of two giant filthy feet, a work that recalls Caravaggio's dirty feet or the feet that Francis washes each year in a Holy Thursday ritual that he routinely performs on prisoners.



# Russian drones set hotel ablaze in Ukrainian Black Sea city

AP ■ KYIV

Russian drones early Sunday struck the Black Sea city of Mykolaiv, setting a hotel ablaze and damaging energy infrastructure, the local Ukrainian governor reported, while ammunition shortages continued to hobble Kyiv's troops in the more than 2-year-old war. Vitaliy Kim, the governor of Ukraine's southern Mykolaiv province, said that Russian drones "seriously damaged" a hotel in its namesake capital, sparking a fire that was later extinguished. Kim also reported that the strike damaged heat-generating infrastructure in the city, but gave no details. He added that there were no casualties. Russian state agency RIA carried claims that the strike on Mykolaiv targeted a shipyard where naval drones are assembled, as well as a hotel housing "English-speaking mercenaries" who have fought for Kyiv. The RIA report cited Sergei Lebedev, described as a coordinator of local pro-Moscow guerrillas. His claim could not be independently verified. Also on Sunday morning, the Russian Defence Ministry said that 17 Ukrainian drones were downed overnight over four regions in the country's southwest. Three drones were intercepted near an oil depot in Lyudinovo, an industrial town some 230 km (143 miles) north of the Ukrainian border, Gov Vladislav Shapsha said. One of the Ukrainian drones damaged communications infrastructure in Russia's southern Belgorod province, which borders Ukraine, Gov Vyacheslav Gladkov said later on Sunday. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The Russian Defence Ministry, meanwhile, claimed Sunday that its forces had destroyed ammunition depots and military equipment housed at three airports across Ukraine, including assault drones stored at Kamyanka Airfield in the country's east. The ministry's online update said the attacks took place over the last 24 hours. There was no immediate comment from Kyiv. Russian shelling on Saturday and overnight wounded at least seven civilians across Ukraine,



A Bohdana cannon fires in Lviv in Ukraine on Saturday. The Bohdana cannons are produced in Ukraine. Danish Foreign Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen and members of parliament met with Ukrainian colleagues during a visit to Lviv

AP/PTI

according to Ukrainian officials. A 36-year-old woman was pulled alive from the rubble after Russian shells on Sunday morning destroyed her home in the northeastern Kharkiv region, the local administration reported. Her 52-year-old neighbour was also rushed to hospital with a stomach wound, the administration said. The Donetsk and Kharkiv regions have seen fierce clashes in recent weeks as Russian forces seek to grind out gains along the more than 1,000-km (620-mile) front line, while ammunition shortages have increasingly hamstrung Ukraine's defences. Russian troops "will likely make significant gains in the coming weeks" while Kyiv awaits much-needed arms from a huge US aid package to reach the front, a Washington-

based think tank said. In its latest operational assessment, the Institute for the Study of War said that Moscow's forces have opportunities to push forward around Avdiivka, the eastern city they took in late February after a gruelling, month-long fight, and threaten nearby Chasiv Yar. Its capture would give Russia control of a hilltop from which it can attack other key cities forming the backbone of Ukraine's eastern defences. Despite this, the think tank assessed that neither of these efforts by Moscow are likely to cause Kyiv's defensive lines to collapse. The Russian Defence Ministry on Sunday confirmed that Moscow's troops had taken a village some 15 km (9 miles) north of Avdiivka, days after the institute reported on its

likely capture early on Thursday. That day's assessment described Moscow's gains as "relatively quick but still relatively marginal," adding that Russian troops had advanced by no more than 5 km (3 miles) over the previous week. US President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he was immediately rushing badly needed weaponry to Ukraine as he signed into law a \$95 billion war aid measure that also included assistance for Israel, Taiwan and other global hot spots. The announcement marked an end to the long, painful battle with Republicans in Congress over urgently needed assistance for Ukraine, with Biden promising on Wednesday that US weapons shipment would begin making the way into Ukraine within hours.

# Pak FM Ishaq Dar appointed as deputy PM

Islamabad (PTI): In a surprise move, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was on Sunday appointed as the country's deputy prime minister.

Dar, 73, a chartered accountant and a veteran politician, belongs to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. According to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division, the appointment was made by Prime Minister Sharif "with immediate effect and until further orders". The announcement was made when both Prime Minister Sharif and Foreign Minister Dar were away in Saudi Arabia to attend a World Economic Forum's moot. It was clear what specific responsibilities Dar would perform as deputy prime minister as traditionally, all powers are concentrated in the prime minister, who is the head of the government. Dar is considered close to former premier Nawaz Sharif due to matrimonial links between the two families, as his son is the son-in-law of the elder Sharif. He has served as finance minister in two previous governments. He was considered the party's answer to all economic problems, serving as finance minister for the fourth and last time in the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition government. Despite being the party's go-to finance expert for decades, he was surprisingly made the foreign minister when Prime Minister Sharif shaped his cabinet in March. Dar was tipped to be made chairman of the Senate, the upper House of the Parliament, but lost the race last month after the PML-N made a deal with the former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to win its support for the coalition government. The party agreed to give the president and chairman senate slot to the PPP, leaving Dar with no option but to settle for some other role in the government. The PML-N and the PPP agreed on a power-sharing deal to form the coalition government even though the former prime minister Imran Khan-backed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed independents won majority seats at the 266-member National Assembly.

# PTI draws flak for wishing to hold talks with military

PTI ■ LAHORE

Leaders of Pakistan's coalition government have criticised former prime minister Imran Khan's party for wanting to engage in dialogue with the powerful military only, saying it should not cry for civil supremacy if it wants to involve the Army in the politics. The remarks from leaders of the coalition government came after Shehryar Afridi, a senior leader of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), on Friday claimed that the party would have talks, but not with the Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) or the ruling PML-N after their recent overtures. Addressing a press conference in Lahore, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) stalwart Khawaja Saad Rafiq said that 71-year-old Khan's PTI should not cry for civil supremacy when it wished to hold negotiations with the military leadership, Geo News reported. Asserting that the PTI leader's comments on negotiations had split the beans, Rafique said, "Imran Khan's traditional behaviour pattern is that his one hand is on their neck and the other on their feet". "He cries outside that he is the flag bearer of freedom and begs for negotiations behind

the door," Rafique said, adding that the politicians would have to communicate with each other anytime later, if not sooner. Meanwhile, during an appearance on a Geo News show, PML-N leader Rana Sanaullah said that the PTI party's mindset was not political as it aimed to seize power via the establishment. "They [PTI] say they will negotiate with them [the establishment], but when it comes to blaming, they mud sling on us [the government] for everything," Sanaullah was quoted as saying. PPP Information Secretary Faisal Karim Kundi also alleged that the PTI was "inviting the military to interfere in politics," according to the report. He said that the political party was of the view that it would not hold talks with politicians and would only talk to the Army chief and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general. "The Sunni Ittehad Council and the PTI are inviting the Army to step into politics. The PPP has always been against the military's involvement in politics," he said. He said the PTI should realise that they had to hold talks with the political opponents instead of expecting a missed call from somewhere else, referring to the military establishment. Meanwhile, PTI leader Shibli

Faraz, who is the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, on Saturday, reiterated the party's readiness to hold talks with the "real" stakeholders, provided a "suitable atmosphere" is ensured that the party's public mandate is respected, and cases against its workers and leaders are withdrawn, the Dawn newspaper reported. On being asked if the PTI was willing to hold negotiations with political parties, Faraz said as a political party, it is always ready to hold talks. "However, there should be an atmosphere conducive to negotiations, which must be conducted within the parameters of the Constitution. The current atmosphere is not suitable for negotiations," an insider quoted the PTI leader as saying in the report. He also said that negotiations will be held with those who have the real power. However, he did not mention whether the talks would be held with the military establishment or political parties. Earlier this week, PTI leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan had claimed that Khan was being pressured to accept a "deal". Rejecting speculation about secret talks with the establishment, Barrister Gohar had made it clear that the party was neither interested in nor holding talks with anyone.

# Tornado devastates Guangzhou

AP ■ BEIJING

Aerial photos posted by Chinese state media on Sunday showed the wide devastation of a part of the southern city of Guangzhou after a tornado swept through the day before, killing five people, injuring dozens others and damaging over a hundred buildings. As businesses and residents began cleaning debris, the images showed block upon block of devastation in the hardest hit areas with a few clusters of buildings standing amid the destruction, a truck overturned on its side and cars crushed by rubble. Some buildings had their sheet metal roofs torn off. The tornado, which knocked

out power in the area, also injured 33 people on Saturday, officials said. Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province and a manufacturing hub near Hong Kong. The tornado which struck during an afternoon thunderstorm that also brought hail damaged 141 factory buildings, according to authorities. They said no homes were destroyed, though a news website under the Southern Media Group reported that some had broken windows. The tornado hit several villages in Guangzhou's Baiyun district. In one, packing material known as "pearl cotton" hung from buildings and trees, a report on the Southern Media website said. It blew into the compound of a nearby furni-

ture company, where workers took shelter in a private home after the metal roof was ripped off their building, the news website reported. Workers were rolling up the material to be carted away for disposal on Sunday. The disaster hit one week after heavy rains and flooding killed at least four people in Guangdong province. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited Guangzhou during an official visit to China earlier in the month. The city, formerly known as Canton, also recently held the Canton Fair, a major export and import exhibition that draws buyers from around the world. In September, two tornadoes killed 10 people in Jiangsu province in eastern China.

# Two Russian journos jailed on 'extremism' charges for alleged work for Navalny group

AP ■ LONDON

Two Russian journalists were arrested by their government on "extremism" charges and ordered by courts there on Saturday to remain in custody pending investigation and trial on accusations of working for a group founded by the late Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny. Konstantin Gabov and Sergey Karelin both denied the charges for which they will be detained for a minimum of two months before any trials begin. Each faces a minimum of two years in prison and a maximum of six years for alleged "participation in an extremist organization," according to Russian courts. They are just the latest journalists arrested amid a Russian government crackdown on dissent and independent media that intensified after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago. The Russian government passed laws criminalizing what it

deems false information about the military, or statements seen as discrediting the military, effectively outlawing any criticism of the war in Ukraine or speech that deviates from the official narrative. A journalist for the Russian edition of Forbes magazine, Sergei Mingazov, was detained on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military, his lawyer said Friday. Gabov and Karelin are accused of preparing materials for a YouTube channel run by Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption, which has been outlawed by Russian authorities. Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony in February. Gabov, who was detained in Moscow, is a freelance producer who has worked for multiple organizations, including Reuters, the court press service said. Reuters did not immediately comment on the ruling by the court. Karelin, who has dual citizen-

ship with Israel, was detained Friday night in Russia's northern Murmansk region. Karelin, 41, has worked for a number of outlets, including for The Associated Press. He was a cameraman for German media outlet Deutsche Welle until the Kremlin banned the outlet from operating in Russia in February 2022. "The Associated Press is very concerned by the detention of Russian video journalist Sergey Karelin," the AP said in a statement. "We are seeking additional information." Russia's crackdown on dissent is aimed at opposition figures, journalists, activists, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and ordinary Russians critical of the Kremlin. A number of journalists have been jailed in relation to their coverage of Navalny, including Antonina Favorskaya, who remains in pre-trial detention at least until May 28 following a hearing last month. Favorskaya was detained and accused by Russian authorities

of taking part in an "extremist organization" by posting on the social media platforms of Navalny's Foundation. She covered Navalny's court hearings for years and filmed the last video of Navalny before he died in the penal colony. Kira Yarmysh, Navalny's spokeswoman, said that Favorskaya did not publish anything on the Foundation's platforms and suggested that Russian authorities have targeted her because she was doing her job as a journalist. Evan Gershkovich, a 32-year-old American reporter for The Wall Street Journal, is awaiting trial on espionage charges at Moscow's notorious Lefortovo Prison. Both Gershkovich and his employer have vehemently denied the charges. Gershkovich was detained in March 2023 while on a reporting trip and has spent over a year in jail; authorities have not detailed what, if any, evidence they have to support the espionage charges.

# Passage of harsh anti-LGBTQ+ law in Iraq draws diplomatic backlash

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Human rights groups and diplomats criticised a law that was quietly passed by the Iraqi parliament over the weekend that would impose heavy prison sentences on gay and transgender people. US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement that the law passed Saturday "threatens those most at risk in Iraqi society" and "can be used to hamper free speech and expression." He warned that the legislation could drive away foreign investment. "International business coalitions have already indicated that such discrimination in Iraq will harm business and economic growth in the country," the statement said. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron called the law "dangerous and worrying." Although homosexuality is taboo in the largely conservative Iraqi society, and politi-

cal leaders have periodically launched anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns, Iraq did not previously have a law that explicitly criminalised it. The law passed Saturday with little notice as an amendment to the country's existing anti-prostitution law. It imposes a sentence of 10 to 15 years for same-sex relations and a prison term of one to three years for people who undergo or perform gender-transition surgeries and for "intentional practice of effeminacy." It also bans any organisation that promotes "sexual deviancy," imposing a sentence of at least seven years and a fine of no less than 10 million dinars (about USD 7,600). A previous draft version of the anti-prostitution law, which was ultimately not passed, would have allowed the death sentence to be imposed for same-sex relations. Iraqi officials have defended the law as upholding societal values and portrayed criticisms of it as

Western interference. The acting Iraqi parliamentary speaker, Mohsen Al-Mandalawi, said in a statement that the vote was "a necessary step to protect the value structure of society" and to "protect our children from calls for moral depravity and homosexuality." Rasha Younes, a senior researcher with the LGBT Rights Programme at Human Rights Watch, said the law's passage "rubber-stamps Iraq's appalling record of rights violations against LGBT people and is a serious blow to fundamental human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression and association, privacy, equality, and nondiscrimination." A report released by the organisation in 2022 accused armed groups in Iraq of abducting, raping, torturing, and killing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people with impunity and the Iraqi government of failing to hold perpetrators accountable.

# Nepal a suitable destination for investment, says PM Prachanda

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal is a suitable destination for investment and there are immense opportunities in the country, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' said on Sunday as he inaugurated a key investment summit here that will see the participation of around 1,800 people from various countries, including 140 from India. Inaugurating the third edition of the Nepal Investment Summit 2024 with the theme 'Emerging Nepal', Prachanda also said that Nepal is a potential country for investment from legal, geographical and strategic perspectives. "Nepal is a suitable destination for foreign investment," the Prime Minister said as he urged investors from across the globe to seize the opportunity and benefit from it. Prachanda, who is leading a government dominated by left parties, said that Nepal is fully committed to a liberal economic policy, providing full protection to investors. He said that an investment-friendly environment has been created in the country. Foreign Minister Barshaman Pun welcomed foreign investment as a catalyst for industrial development, infrastructure development, job creation, export promotion and the transfer of knowledge, skills, and technology. He expressed confidence that the summit will lead to agreements and collaboration between investors and stakeholders as Nepal's economic indicators are stabilising and showing positive trends. Speaking on the occasion, India's Ambassador to Nepal Navin Srivastava said that the Government of India, in future, will continue to encourage Indian investors further in Nepal. "It is a matter of great satisfaction that India is today the biggest cumulative investor in Nepal with more than 33 per cent of Nepal's FDI stock currently amounting to nearly Nepali rupees 89 billion," the diplomat said.

# Hindu festival in SW Pak brings a mountainous region to life

Hinglaj (Pakistan): The ascent of steep mud volcanoes marks the start of Hindu pilgrims' religious rituals in southwestern Pakistan. They climb hundreds of stairs or clamber over rocks to reach the summit, tossing coconuts and rose petals into the shallow crater while seeking divine permission to visit Hinglaj Mata, an ancient cave temple that is the focus of their three-day worship. The dramatic surroundings of Hingol National Park in Baluchistan province are the setting for Pakistan's largest Hindu festival, Hinglaj Yatra, which started on Friday and ends on Sunday. Organisers say more than 100,000 Hindus are expected to participate. Muslim-majority Pakistan is home to 4.4 million Hindus,

just 2.14% of the population, and Hinglaj Mata is one of the few Hindu sites that continues to draw large numbers of pilgrims every year from across the country. Muslims and Hindus generally live peacefully in Pakistan, from where most of the Hindus migrated to India when it was divided by British colonialists in 1947. But there have been attacks on Hindu temples in recent years as relations between the rivals remain tense. Hindus believe Hinglaj Mata is one of the places where the remains of Sati, the goddess of marital felicity and longevity, fell to earth after she ended her life. Maharaj Gopal, the temple's most senior cleric, explains why people flock to it.

"It is the most sacred pilgrimage in the Hindu religion," said Gopal. "Whoever visits the temple and worships accordingly during these three days will have all of their sins forgiven." The journeys begin hundreds of kilometres (miles) away, mostly from neighbouring Sindh province. Hundreds of packed buses set off from cities like Hyderabad and Karachi, travelling along the Makran Coastal Highway that hugs Pakistan's south and southwest. But there's scant parking and vehicular access to the holy sites, so many pilgrims disembark and complete their travel by walking over parched and rocky terrain, sometimes barefoot and carrying children or luggage.

# Dubai plans to move its busy int'l airport to \$35 billion new facility within 10 years

AP ■ DUBAI

Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, will move its operations to the city-state's second, sprawling airport in its southern desert reaches "within the next 10 years" in a project worth nearly \$35 billion, its ruler said on Sunday. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum's announcement marks the latest chapter in the rebound of its long-haul carrier Emirates after the coronavirus pandemic grounded international travel. Plans have been on the books for years to move the operations of the airport known as DXB to Al Maktoum International Airport at Dubai World Central which had also been delayed by the repercus-

sions of the sheikhdom's 2009 economic crisis. "We are building a new project for future generations, ensuring continuous and stable development for our children and their children in turn," Sheikh Mohammed said in an online statement. "Dubai will be the world's airport, its port, its urban hub and its new global centre." The announcement included computer-rendered images of curving, white terminal reminiscent of the traditional Bedouin tents of the Arabian Peninsula. The airport will include five parallel runways and 400 aircraft gates, the announcement said. The airport now has just two runways, like Dubai International Airport. The financial health of the carrier Emirates has served as a

barometer for the aviation industry worldwide and the wider economic health of this city-state. Dubai and the airline rebounded quickly from the pandemic by pushing forward with tourism even as some countries more slowly came out of their pandemic crouch. The number of passengers flying through DXB surged last year beyond its total for 2019 with 86.9 million passengers. Its 2019 annual traffic was 86.3 million passengers. The airport had 89.1 million passengers in 2018 — its busiest-ever year before the pandemic, while 66 million passengers passed through in 2022. Earlier in February, Dubai announced its best-ever tourism numbers, saying it hosted 17.15 million international overnight visitors in

2023. Average hotel occupancy stood at around 77%. Its boom-and-bust real estate market remains on a hot streak, nearing all-time high valuations. But as those passenger numbers skyrocketed, it again put new pressure on the capacity of DXB, which remains constrained on all sides by residential neighborhoods and two major highways. Al Maktoum International Airport, some 45 km (28 miles) away from DXB, opened in 2010 with one terminal. It served as a parking lot for Emirates' double-decker Airbus A380s and other aircraft during the pandemic and slowly has come back to life with cargo and private flights in the time since. It also hosts the biennial Dubai Air Show and has a vast, empty desert in which to expand.



# FIU notifies fresh money laundering, terror financing reporting alerts for capital markets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh set of 'alert indicators' have been issued by India's financial intelligence unit (FIU) for capital markets, insurance companies, online payment gateway intermediaries and crypto currency service providers for effective checking of suspicious transactions in their channels as part of the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regime. These new guidelines have been issued under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) during the 2022-23 financial year and published in a recently released report that has been accessed by PTI. This is part of the anti-money laundering (AML) and combating the financing of terrorism (CFT) regime followed by the country as part of which financial institutions and intermediaries are mandated to share suspicious transaction reports (STRs) with the FIU which subsequently analyses them

and shares them for action with various investigative and intelligence agencies. FIU proactively engages with the financial sector regulators and reporting entities to understand emerging risks and to undertake immediate mitigating measures, the charter for the federal financial data mining agency says. In the case of capital markets, these supplemental guidelines have led to "a strategic shift in the manner in which FIU received information with respect to securities market transactions," the report said. These 'alert indicators' will address "emerging risks" in the market infrastructure institutions (MIIs) — stock exchanges and depositories—like synchronised and manipulative trade practices, order spoofing, mis-utilisation of client funds by the stock brokers, suspicious off-market transactions etc. In light of the growing trading volumes, the role the MIIs becomes "cardinal" in making the AML/CFT architecture more robust, it said.



Though the MIIs have been sending suspicious transaction reports (STRs) to the FIU for years now, the report said there was a lack of alert indicators "specific to them" and this left a lot of scope for improvement in their reporting quality, the report said. The supplemental guidelines

have specified clear areas of focus for the MIIs and it is expected that this would lead to a "marked improvement" in the reporting quality and thus will help FIU to generate meaningful intelligence for law enforcement agencies like the Income-tax department, ED, CBI, DRI etc., it said.

The new alert indicators were issued after a working group of agencies like markets regulator SEBI, FIU, stock exchanges and depositories decided to "comprehensively" revise these guidelines and change the system of only stock brokers and depository participants reporting STRs to the FIU, as

they were the first point of contact for a client to access the capital markets. For stock exchanges, the fresh alert indicators mandate they consider cases where there is suspicion of mis-utilisation of client funds by the stockbrokers such as frauds and also analyse cases where "serious anomalies" from the perspective of money laundering and terrorism financing are observed during the course of inspections and audit of stock brokers, the report said. In the case of depositories, the new alert indicators for generating STRs require them to deal with identification of suspicious off-market transfer, a way of transferring shares directly between two accounts without the involvement of an exchange platform. A similar working group, that included insurance regulator IRDAI, went into issues related to the insurance sector during 2022-23 fiscal and the revised guidelines laid "special stress" for generating alerts in cases of frauds experienced by the insurance firms and

analyse these from the AML/CFT perspective and furnish reports to FIU in suitable cases, the report said. In the case of online payment gateways, a working group comprising banking regulator RBI, National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) "extensively" studied the business model of these technology-enabled financial services firms as these "new-age" players pose challenges in respect of transparency of the parties involved in transactions facilitated by them and the relative speed with which such transactions are completed, leading to emergence of AML/CFT risks. The agency also issued alert indicators for virtual digital asset (VDA) or crypto currency service providers ranging from directions to register with the FIU to carrying out "enhanced due diligence to implementation of travel rule." The travel rule requires crypto currency service providers to share sender and recipient data with each other during transactions.

In the case of credit rating agencies (CRAs), the new guidelines will ensure timely reporting of STRs by them to FIU and help in identifying serious corporate frauds having AML/CFT implications in the early stages and ensure timely action by law enforcement agencies based on such financial intelligence preventing siphoning of funds by delinquent issuers, it said. A similar set of alert indicators were issued to debenture trustees and they were directed to call for "periodic reports" from issuers of debentures and take appropriate action in the interest of the debenture holders as soon as any breach of trust deed or law comes to their notice even as the FIU said these violations may have implications from the AML/CFT perspective. The FIU has also shared the new alert indicator guidelines for STR reporting with real estate agents categorised as designated non-financial businesses and professions (DNFBP) under PMLA.

## Banks may have to slowdown loan growth in FY25: S&P

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian banks' credit growth, profitability and asset quality would remain robust in current fiscal reflecting strong economic growth, but they may be compelled to slow down their loan growth as deposits are not growing at a similar pace, S&P Global Ratings has said. In the Asia-Pacific 2Q 2024 Banking Update, S&P Global Ratings Director SSEA Nikita Anand said the agency expects the sector's strong credit growth to moderate to 14 per cent in FY25, from 16 per cent in FY24, if deposit growth, especially retail deposits, remain tepid. Anand said there is a deterioration in loan-to-deposit ratio is every bank, with loan growth being 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth. "We expect banks to bring down their loan growth in FY25 and bring it in line with deposit growth. If banks do not do that, they would be paying higher to get wholesale funding, which will impact profitability," she said at a recent webinar of S&P Global Ratings.



Generally, loan growth has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18 per cent growth, public sector banks on the other hand see loan growth in the range of 12-14 per cent. Anand said Indian banks can support loan growth of as high as 15-20 per cent over three years without need for raising capital. The loan growth is 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth of the banking sector. "For India, we expect credit

growth, profitability and asset quality to remain robust reflecting strong economic growth. Loan growth is 1.5 times of nominal GDP growth, while deposit growth is in line with nominal GDP growth. "Loan growth should come in line with deposits rather than outpacing deposits. If credit growth doesn't slow, banks will have to fund it from wholesale funding and higher cost of such funding could further strain margins and hurt profitability," Anand said.

## Need to be watchful about steel imports, says TV Narendran



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As steel imports continue to surge, Tata Steel CEO T V Narendran has said there is a need to be watchful about the situation. The comment comes at a time when India has reported a 38 per cent surge in steel imports to 8.319 million tonnes, becoming a net importer of the commodity during the 2023-24 financial year. Speaking to PTI, the industry executive said, "It would be a pity if the situation continues in the long run. We have to be watchful about imports." As long as it is unfair imports, the government needs to deal with it, Narendran said without elaborating further. Steel consumption is expected to grow 8-10 per cent in the ongoing 2024-25

fiscal year, he said in reply to a separate question on demand. Steelmakers have been raising concerns on increasing imports from certain countries, including China and seeking the Government's intervention on the issue. Domestic players have also been demanding a curb on imports and review of free trade agreements (FTAs) with several countries. "I don't think reviewing FTAs would be easy. But that's for the government to decide," Narendran added. As per BigMint (formerly SteelMint) data, India's crude steel production increased around 14 per cent to 144 million tonnes (MT) in FY24 from 126 MT in FY23. The consumption of finished steel stood at 136 MT, up 13 per cent over 120 MT in the year-ago period.

## RCAP lenders urge Hinduja Group arm to stick to resolution plan deadline

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concerned over slow progress, the lenders of debt-ridden Reliance Capital (RCAP) have asked the Hinduja Group arm, IndusInd International Holdings Ltd, to expedite the process of obtaining necessary regulatory approvals and stick to the resolution plan deadline of May 27.

In a meeting held in Mumbai on Friday with the senior officials of IndusInd International Holdings' (IIHL), the lenders of RCAP said the company has to make a payment of Rs 9,650 crore to them by the said date, a source said. It is to be noted that the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) Mumbai, while approving the resolution plan on February 27, directed the IIHL to implement the resolution plan within 90 days i.e. May 27. As per the approved resolution plan, IIHL has to make an upfront payment of Rs 9,650 crore to the RCAP lenders. According to the sources, the lenders expressed concerns over the slow progress towards the implementation of RCAP resolution plan, as



IIHL is yet to receive the crucial IRDAI approval on the resolution plan. The IRDAI has raised multiple queries and concerns over the proposed corporate structure for the transfer of RCAP's insurance businesses to IIHL, and the company is yet to address those concerns. IRDAI approval is crucial for the transfer of insurance businesses of Reliance Capital i.e. Reliance General Insurance and Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, to the IIHL. The RBI approval on transfer of RCAP business to IIHL also ends on May 17. The approval granted on November 17 was valid for a period of only six months. In case, IIHL fails to complete the resolution process within the timeline, it will have to give reasons of the same to the RBI while reapplying for fresh approval.

The NCLT on February 27, 2024, approved Hinduja Group firm IIHL's Rs 9,650-crore resolution plan for Reliance Capital. In November 2021, the Reserve Bank superseded the board of Reliance Capital on governance issues and payment defaults by the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group company. The central bank had appointed Nageswara Rao Y as the administrator, who invited bids in February 2022 to take over the company. Reliance Capital had a debt of over Rs 40,000 crore, and four applicants had initially bid with resolution plans. However, the committee of creditors rejected all four plans for lower bid values and a challenge mechanism was initiated in which IIHL and Torrent Investments participated.

## Boult IPO likely next year: Co founder Varun

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian consumer tech brand Boult plans to go public next year, with a revenue benchmark of Rs 1,000 crore in FY25, as it expands into international markets and new categories, according to its co-founder Varun Gupta. In an exclusive interview with PTI, Gupta spoke in detail about his vision to make the Indian company global, listing out the homegrown brand, and his ambitious targets for this fiscal year. "We are not focusing on IPO this year, our primary focus is to foray into offline markets, international geographies, and new categories, but possibly in the next year," he said. The young entrepreneur said the company has set an internal touchstone for itself before it goes public. "... We have an internal benchmark, when we hit a Rs 1,000 crore revenue, that's when we want to go for an IPO. Technically, we're eligible to go for an IPO today because we're profitable and comfortably over Rs 500 crore. But we have an internal milestone of Rs 1,000 crore, and that is when we will consider ourselves eligible for that (IPO)," Gupta said. He further said the bootstrapped brand expects to close the financial year 2023-24 at a touchdown of Rs 650-700 crore. "In FY25, we're looking at a Rs 1,000 crore target, a very reasonable target because of our foray into new categories, because of our growing

presence in our TWS (True Wireless Stereo), which is the biggest category for us. And thirdly, getting offline as a channel and thereby international channels," he said. Boult recently launched a new category — Soundbars, to further diversify market offerings. The homegrown company, which has peers like boAt and Noise, expanded its reach to offline retail stores around October last year. The idea is to be accessible and available at 20,000 points of sale within the country for the customers to get access, availability, and credibility, Gupta said, because when a customer sees the product in an offline store he gets a lot of credibility. "We're proud of the fact that we have penetrated every state in India, we are live at over 4,000 points of sales." Marking its debut globally, Boult tapped into the US and UK markets in May 2023, and in January 2024, it set foot in Nepal. It received great responses from all the geographies, the young entrepreneur said. "Right from the beginning, our vision was to make in India, for the world. We wanted to make a global brand out of India, to change the worldwide narrative of India by creating a top technology brand, and to make the nation proud. The plan forward is to foray into Europe, Australia, and thereafter Africa as well," he said.

## ITPCL debt restructuring: NCLAT rejects SBI objection on liquidation value provided by PNB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal NCLAT has rejected SBI's pleas opposing the liquidation value of ITPCL provided by the debt-ridden firm's lead banker PNB and said the country's largest lender cannot "wriggle out" the debt restructuring process of the IL&FS group's thermal power company. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has dismissed all three applications moved by SBI and said it does "not find any error in fixing the liquidation value as of 30.09.2018" of IL&FS Tamil Nadu Power Company Ltd (ITPCL). The appellate tribunal observed that as per the RBI circular, an Inter-Creditor Agreement has been entered

between the lenders. Moreover, over 90 per cent lenders by value and 75 per cent by numbers have already approved ITPCL restructuring plan. The lenders of ITPCL "with the requisite majority have already taken a decision to approve restructuring plan, the SBI, who is also one of the lenders, cannot be permitted to wriggle out of the terms of the ITPCL restructuring plan". "... As per decision taken by the majority, prescribed in Clause 10 of the RBI Circular, the Restructuring Plan and the Liquidation Value taken therein is binding on the Applicant (SBI)," said NCLAT in its order passed earlier this month. The RBI Circular mandates that Inter-Creditor Agreement



has been entered between the parties, according to which any decision agreed by lenders with 75 per cent by value of total outstanding credit facilities and 60 per cent of lenders by number, shall be

binding upon all the lenders. ITPCL is an SPV (special purpose vehicle) incorporated by IL&FS to set up a 3,180 MW thermal power plant in Cuddalore District of Tamil Nadu. It currently has 1,200

MW (2x600 MW) operational. The project is being implemented in phases. Second phase shall have 3x660 MW. The State Bank of India (SBI), which owns a minority/small part of around Rs 9,000 crore debt being restructured, had opposed the liquidation value obtained by PNB, saying that it was based as on October 15, whereas, it was to be calculated as on March 31, 2023. The liquidation value provided by PNB was "five years old" and is of no use for it for taking a commercial decision on the implementation of the Restructuring Plan and is also "not in accordance with law", SBI had submitted. SBI had requested NCLAT to direct PNB and ITPCL to

calculate and provide liquidation value as on the date of execution of the Master Restructuring Agreement and to stay further distribution of fund and payout as per the approved restructuring plan. However, SBI's plea was rejected by a two-member NCLAT bench which said: "The Liquidation Value as on 30.09.2018 is as per order dated 12.03.2020 where this Tribunal has accepted 15.10.2018 as the cut-off, we do not find any error in fixing the Liquidation Value as on 30.09.2018." PNB has appointed two firms and both had submitted two different valuations of Rs 4,580.03 crore and Rs 6,188.66 crore, following which it has appointed a third valuer as per the rule and regulations.

## Indian startup to develop electric air taxi prototype by March 2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chennai-based startup ePlane Company expects to develop a certifiable prototype of a flying electric taxi by March next year as it works on ways to alleviate urban congestion. Incubated out of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, the company also aims to initially commercialise its drones that can carry a payload of 2-6 kilograms in the coming months, according to a

senior executive. The ePlane Company's Founder and CEO Satya Chakravarthy said it is developing an eVTOL (electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing) aircraft and to begin with, it will be a three or four-seater plane which can be converted into an air ambulance. "By March next year is when we expect to develop the first certifiable prototype. It will take another couple of years to get the certification from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA),"

Chakravarthy told PTI. As per the startup's website, an ePlane will take only 14 minutes to reach a place that will take 60 minutes by a personal vehicle. The company's vision is to alleviate congestion in urban spaces with eVTOLs. Besides, The ePlane company is developing drones, which are expected to be commercialised in the coming months. Initially, it plans to come out with a basic category and then an enhanced category of drones.

Chakravarthy said that both sets of drones — 2-6 kg payload and up to 50 kg payload — will be able to fly up 40-60 kilometres. Meanwhile, InterGlobe Enterprises and US-based Archer Aviation plan to launch an all-electric air taxi service in India in 2026, that will carry passengers from Connaught Place in the national capital to Gurugram in Haryana in just 7 minutes. InterGlobe Enterprises is the parent of the country's largest airline IndiGo.

## CII launches corporate governance charter for startups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body CII on Sunday announced it has launched a charter for startups that enlist voluntary recommendations on corporate governance keeping in view unique nuances to govern startups. The Corporate Governance Charter also prescribes guidelines appropriate for startups based on the specific stages of their life cycle. "This charter is designed for entities incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013 only,

and therefore the term 'Startup'. However, entities which are in the nature of sole proprietorship, limited liability partnership, partnerships may adopt similar structures/structures/guidelines for corporate governance within their organisation," the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated. The purpose of this charter is to help startups become responsible corporate citizens and also enable them to share it with their stakeholders to establish themselves as being well-governed, it said.



**TYPES OF MICROTIA**



# MICROTIA CHALLENGES

Microtia, a congenital condition involving underdeveloped or absent outer ears, poses significant challenges for kids and families. ARCHANA JYOTI explores the medical, psychological, and societal aspects of the disorder

Microtia affects one out of every 3,000 newborns. It happens when the ear or ears do not fully develop during the first trimester of pregnancy; as a result, the kid is born without any ear or with ears that are small or underdeveloped. Although microtia is identified at birth, the condition's cause is not fully understood. It can cause facial difficulties, and hearing impairments in newborns.

unfairly labeled as "imbecile" or "stupid." Consequently, there's a significant demand for corrective surgeries in Western countries to address these deformities and mitigate associated social stigma. In India, microtia, characterized by varying degrees of underdevelopment or absence of the external ear, presents another significant challenge. Unilateral involvement is common, and the severity ranges from minor defects to total absence (anotia). The intricate anatomy of the ear, with its complex cartilage structure and close adherence to the skin, complicates reconstruction efforts.

techniques offer surgeons options for achieving optimal outcomes based on individual patient needs and anatomical considerations. Overall, ear reconstruction for congenital deformities requires a nuanced understanding of anatomy, meticulous surgical technique, and a tailored approach to each patient's unique circumstances.



**PROF. (DR) VINAY K TIWARI**  
Dean, North DMC, Medical College & Hindu Rao Hospital, Delhi. Senior Consultant Burns, Plastic & Maxillofacial Surgery

Congenital ear deformities indeed present a unique set of challenges, both anatomically and socially. The incidence rate of 1 in 3000 live births, excluding prominent ear deformity, highlights the importance of understanding and addressing these conditions. While in India, there may be less stigma attached to some particular related deformities like 'Bat ear', the situation differs in Western countries, where societal perceptions can be harsher. Prominent ear deformity, often colloquially referred to as "Bat ear", stands out as the most common among congenital ear anomalies. This prominence can lead to social challenges, with children sometimes being

Ear reconstruction for microtia typically involves a staged approach. The first stage involves creating a 3D cartilaginous framework, often sourced from autogenous rib cartilage (typically from the 6th to 9th ribs). The optimal age for this procedure is usually between 7 to 10 years when rib cartilage is soft and more moldable. Alternatively, some surgeons opt for ready-made frameworks composed of inert materials like Medpore or silicone. Careful dissection is essential during rib cartilage harvesting due to the proximity of vital thoracic structures. In the second stage of reconstruction, typically performed around six months after the initial procedure, the framework is lifted from the back and skin grafted. Subsequent stages may involve further refinement and correction, such as lobular correction. Various techniques, such as the Brent, Nagata, and Fermin techniques, have been developed to address the complexities of ear reconstruction. These



**DR MAHESH MANGAL**  
Chairman HOD and Senior Consultant Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi

Microtia is a birth deformity. The ear develops by six developing points and whenever there is some problem in development of these points it results in ear defects. Ear anomalies have a wide spectrum ranging from complete absence of external ear to minor deformities. It is not very uncommon in India. Hearing takes place by two mechanisms, one is through the bone around the ear and another is through the internal ear. Whenever the internal ear is affected or it is not developed, then the person hears through bone conduction. In cases of bilateral microtia, the development of the internal ear is affected which results in loss of hearing and development of the patient. But not so in cases of unilateral microtia. Microtia is also synchronous in some patients and they have other facial deformities as well.

## Parents of Microtia Kid Navigate Journey with Love

As the parents of a girl child with microtia, our journey has been filled with conflicting emotions and difficult decisions. On one hand, we want nothing more than to ensure the best possible outcome for my child—to give her every opportunity to thrive, to overcome any obstacles she may face, and to live a happy, fulfilling life. But on the other hand, we're faced with the harsh reality of our child's condition—the likely surgeries, the therapies, the financial burdens, and the emotional toll it will take on our family. We're forced to grapple with questions of risk and uncertainty, wondering if the benefits of treatment outweigh the potential drawbacks and if we're making the right choices for our child's future.

As my daughter grew older, she's ten years old now, and became more aware of her differences, she began to ask questions of her own. Why do I look different? Why do people stare at me? Will I ever be like everyone else? And as much as we tried to reassure her and provide answers, we couldn't help but wonder if we were doing enough to help her feel accepted and loved just the way she is. But amidst all the questions, one thing will remain constant: No matter how difficult the road ahead may be, we'll stand by her side every step of the way, offering support, encouragement, and unconditional acceptance, no matter what. (Agony of a parent of a child with Microtia disorder)



**DR SONAM RATHI**  
Consultant, ENT Apollomedics Super Speciality Hospitals, Lucknow, UP

Microtia can affect hearing- if the canal is narrow or completely blocked- conductive hearing loss. Also, sensorineural hearing loss is associated with malformation/deformity of the inner or middle ear. It can also be due to factors during pregnancy in the mother like consuming alcohol or some medication for acne such as Isotretinoin or due to malfunction of thyroid hormone. Some Genetic abnormalities & syndromes such as Treacher Collins, Trisomy 13,18,21, Klippel Feil syndrome, TORCH infection, Rh incompatibility, radiation, and even Gestational Diabetes are also responsible. Yes, most of these are correct. Requiring multistage pinna reconstruction using rib cartilage or artificial prosthetic materials, formation of the ear canal, or simply an artificial pinna prosthesis if the patient wants just a cosmetic correction. A Graduated Approach is needed including Pinnoplasty - Otoplasty, Incisionless otoplasty, Nonsurgicand al Otoplasty, along with correction of hearing loss if any. Cost ranges from a few thousand for a prosthesis to 3-4 lakhs for multistage pinna reconstruction.

Reconstruction in microtia is a multi-stage procedure. It takes three to four stages, a duration of one to one and a half years to complete all these stages. Usually, the procedure is started at the age of nine to ten years and by that age adult size of the ear is achieved. In cases of unilateral microtia, we take the image of a normal ear and accordingly, the size and shape of the ear are reconstructed. Patients who do not prefer multistage procedures are given the option of osteo-integrated artificial ear implants for reconstruction. In a private hospital setup, a patient has to pay for treatment procedures. But in a government hospital, it is free of cost.

Microtia is not preventable it is a congenital anomaly and happens in the first three months of pregnancy. It is very difficult to diagnose by ultrasound during pregnancy as the ear is such a small structure. Ear deformities from birth broadly include those affecting the outer ear/pinna & Ear canal-like altered shape or absence of pinna- Anotia/microtia/macrotia/Bat ear/Cup ear/Cryptotia /Coloboma/Stahl's ear/Satyr ear/Darwin's Tubercle/ Preauricular skin tags and sinus or atresia or stenosis of the ear canal. It can involve the middle part of the ear or inner ear- which is not visible but causes hearing loss.

## JOURNEY WITHIN Conquering Procrastination

Spiritual and Meditation Guru, **DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU**, suggests ways to how to overcome procrastination. **Understanding the Problem:** Procrastination can be caused by fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of motivation, or poor time management skills. Finding what triggers your procrastination is important. Awareness is the first step towards change. Divide work into smaller and manageable tasks: Large and challenging tasks often become the focal point of procrastination. It is important to break them down into smaller, more manageable tasks. The initial hurdle is often the hardest to overcome, but once you get into the flow, you might be surprised at how much you can accomplish. Convince yourself to work on the task for just 25 minutes before taking a break, so it doesn't feel like an endless uphill struggle. Additionally, set up small rewards for completing tasks or reaching milestones. This positive reinforcement helps your brain associate productivity with satisfaction. **Work on SMART Goal:** SMART means Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. It offers individuals a structured approach to defining objectives. By following these principles, individuals create a clear roadmap that outlines exactly what needs to be accomplished, how progress will be tracked, and when goals will be achieved. **Avoid distractions:** Minimize distractions by silencing your phone, working in a quiet area, and using website blockers. A cluttered environment can drain mental energy, so keep your workplace clean to promote a calm and focused environment. **Plan your day:** Allocate specific time slots in your calendar for work focused on individual tasks rather than relying solely on willpower to manage your schedule. **Practice Self-Compassion:** We all experience procrastination sometimes. Be gentle with yourself, accept it, create a plan to progress, and



**DR ARCHIKA SUDHANSHU**  
Spiritual and Meditation Guru

regain momentum. Reflect on past accomplishments tackling difficult tasks. Often, in moments of uncertainty, we overlook our history of overcoming challenges. **Daily positive affirmations:** Daily positive affirmations such as "progress, not perfection" and "one day, one step at a time" can aid in conquering procrastination. The fear of imperfection often hinders action, leading to procrastination. Embrace mistakes as opportunities for growth without fear of failure. Always think positive: Shift focus from potential threats to exciting possibilities. Have confidence in your ability to overcome challenges. Use meditation techniques to recognize and address negative emotions that may trigger procrastination. **Cultivate a growth mindset:** Nurture a growth mindset, embracing the belief that skills and abilities can evolve through dedication and practice. By perceiving tasks as chances for personal development rather than mere obstacles, we are more inclined to face them directly. Surround yourself with productive and positive people. **Stay consistent and don't compare your progress to others:** Visualize your daily progress to stay motivated. Consistent, effective planning enhances motivation. Focus on your own journey and celebrate your victory. Trust in your self-worth and maintain positive self-talk. **Exercise Regularly:** Engage in physical activities like short walks, light workouts, or yoga to boost focus, energy, and overall health. Although procrastination may seem terrifying, it can be overcome by fostering a growth mindset.

## FROM THE DOCTOR'S DIARY

### The perils of Sugar

- Refined sugar on your skin is called aging
- Refined sugar in your teeth is called cavities
- Refined sugar in your eyes is called glaucoma
- Refined sugar in your sleep is called insomnia
- Refined sugar in your blood is called diabetes
- Refined sugar in a baby's brain is called ADHD
- Excess refined sugar in your system is called cancer
- Refined sugar in an adults brain is called dementia and Alzheimer

## Mindful eating is healthy eating

**SHARMILA CHAND** explores mindful eating with a dish prepared by **CHEF MANISH MEHROTRA**, Culinary Director – Indian Accent, emphasizing its focus on nurturing a healthier relationship with food. It's not about dieting but rather savoring each bite, embracing nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment in every meal, she says

Holistic Wellness is a very broad term that denotes mental, physical, and emotional well-being, including every single molecule of our body. 'Mindful Eating' is one significant aspect of Holistic Wellbeing. You embark on a healthy culinary journey through the awareness of the right ingredients, the kind of herbs and spices used, and of course, the style of cooking. Hence, it's not about dieting or depriving yourself; it's about building a healthier relationship with food and enjoying every bite. Take it slow and let your meals be a source of nutrients, happiness, and fulfillment.

### KOLHAPURI CHICKEN SALAD, AVOCADO KOSHIMBIR

- INGREDIENTS For Chicken**
- Chicken breast 100 gms
  - Salt to taste
  - Kolhapuri masala 1 tsp
  - Olive oil 2 tsp
  - Ginger, finely chopped ½ tsp
  - Garlic, finely chopped ½ tsp
  - Green chilies, finely chopped ½ tsp
  - Fresh cream 1 tbsp
  - Masala gravy (see p. 176) 1 tsp
  - For Avocado Koshimbir
  - Onion, diced 2 tsp
  - Tomatoes, deseeded and diced 2 tsp
  - Seedless cucumber, diced 2 tsp
  - Avocado, diced 1 tbsp
  - Coriander leaves, chopped ½ tsp
  - Lime juice ½ tsp
  - Chaat masala ½ tsp
  - Tamarind chutney 1 tsp
  - Green chutney 1 tsp
  - Crushed roasted peanuts 2 tsp
- TO SERVE**
- Sunflower seeds, roasted as garnish
  - Coriander leaves as garnish
  - Edible flowers as garnish

**METHOD**  
**Prepare Chicken**  
♦ Cut chicken breast into thin, long slices. Marinate with salt, half the quantity of Kolhapuri masala, and olive oil for at least an hour.  
♦ Heat a non-stick pan, without oil. When it is hot, place the marinated chicken on the pan and cook. Do not overcook; the chicken should still be juicy in the center when done. Keep aside to cool.  
♦ When the chicken has cooled, shred it into juliennes.  
♦ Heat oil in a pan. Sauté chopped ginger, garlic, and green chilies. Add masala



gravy and the remaining Kolhapuri masala. Sauté well. Add fresh cream. Cook the masalas in the cream till the mixture is semi-dry. Add shredded chicken and toss well till coated.  
♦ Prepare Avocado Koshimbir:  
♦ In a mixing bowl, add diced onions, tomatoes, cucumber, avocado, and coriander. Mix well. Sprinkle lime juice, chaat masala, tamarind chutney, and green chutney. Toss well. Finish with crushed peanuts.

**SERVE**  
Mold avocado koshimbir on the center of a plate. Arrange shredded chicken salad on top. Garnish with roasted sunflower seeds (optional), coriander leaves and edible flowers. The sunflower seeds add extra crunch to the salad.  
(Sharmila Chand is an Author and Freelance Journalist. She writes on Food, Travel, Art, Holistic Wellness, and Lifestyle)

## ORAL HEALTH Diet, Mint, Ginger Impact

Oral health isn't just about brushing and flossing your teeth. Your dietary choices are also extremely important. The starchy or sugary foods we love are also loved by the bacteria in your mouth that can cause gum disease. Keeping your teeth healthy long-term is still difficult. This means maintaining a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, protein-rich foods, calcium-rich foods, and whole grains for a healthy smile as well as a healthy body. Always aim for a balanced diet. It is the most important key to staying healthy and young. Incorporating natural foods should be your goal so that you can reduce your consumption of processed foods. Taking care of your oral health also has a big impact on your overall health. So one important thing you need to keep in mind is that whatever you eat comes out of your mouth. Hence, bacteria can also travel from your mouth to other parts of your body and this puts you at risk of many diseases. Mint can significantly benefit your oral health due to its antiseptic properties. This is why it is such a popular

Dental health isn't just about brushing and flossing—it's heavily influenced by what you eat, **RAJDEEP JOSHI** says as he explains how natural foods like mint and ginger play a role in combating bacteria and strengthening teeth



- MINT & GINGER HEALTHY DRINK**
- INGREDIENTS**
- 8/10 mint leaves
  - 2 tsp fresh ginger juice
  - 1/2 tsp coriander
  - 1/4 tsp Chaat Masala
  - 1 tsp lemon juice
  - 1/2 tsp fennel powder
  - 2 1/2 tsp jaggery
- (Jaggery is a natural sweetener and has many health benefits, replacing your regular sugar with jaggery can be very beneficial. is.)
- 3 cup water
  - Salt to taste
- How to make the recipe**  
In a mixing bowl add mint leaves, fennel powder, chaat masala, jaggery, ginger paste, lemon juice, salt, and a little water. Grind in a food processor or mixer grinder to a paste. Take the paste in a mixing bowl, add 3 cups of water, and mix well. Refrigerate the water for 2 hours (it is optional) and serve the healthy drink.  
(The author is a Nutrition Coach)

ingredient in toothpaste, mouthwash, and dental floss. While mint kills harmful bacteria in the mouth, it prevents cavities and gum infections as well as freshens breath. By killing oral germs, mint also helps keep your teeth and tongue clean. Ginger can help whiten and strengthen your teeth. Ginger root is nature's remedy for your health. Like its strong flavor, you only need a fraction of the root to experience its powerful healing properties. Gingerol is the main ingredient that gives ginger its spice. But it doesn't just spice things up – it has the power to fight infection, kill bacteria, and reduce inflammation to a minimum. To get the maximum benefit from the healing properties of ginger, make sure to eat it fresh and raw. Like most vegetables, roots, and herbs, ginger loses some of its vitamins and nutrients when cooked or processed.





# KKR wary of resurgent DC, marauding McGurk

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Resurgent Delhi Capitals will look to exploit Kolkata Knight Riders' bowling vulnerabilities and ascend to top-four in the table during their Indian Premier League match here on Monday.

With four wins in their last five matches, the Rishabh Pant-led side is gradually assembling their pieces and starting to look like a force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side has endured three defeats in their last five matches with their profligacy in bowling hurting them badly.

Signed up as Lungi Ngidi's replacement, Aussie Jake Fraser-McGurk has proved to be their X-factor with his ferocious batting display at the top.

A natural power-hitter with superb hand-eye coordination, the 22-year-old has taken the IPL by storm scoring 247 runs

in five matches at a strike-rate of 237.50.

His brutal treatment of the otherwise sensational Jasprit Bumrah stands as a testimony of his skill-level. McGurk slammed a slower ball from the Mumbai Indians pacer for a six and it was the first time a batter lofted Bumrah for a first-ball six.

The pacer conceded 18 runs in his first over, the most by him in this season in a single over as DC overcame MI by 10 runs on Saturday.

He made a 27-ball 84 against MI, and McGurk will relish the batting-friendly conditions at Eden Gardens where 523 runs, including a record 42 sixes, were scored between Punjab Kings and KKR.

The PBKS on that occasion had scaled down a world record 262.

But DC's batting is not only about McGurk, the South African Tristian Stubbs also left everyone in awe with his astonishing power-hitting, smashing a 25-ball 48 not out



against Mumbai. Pant is also making rapid progress with every match as the DC top-five in Fraser-McGurk, Abhishek Porel, Shai Hope, Pant and Stubbs will be

a cause of concern for KKR bowling. The KKR replaced injured Mitchell Starc with Sri Lankan pacer Dushmantha Chameera but the latter gave away 16 runs

per over in his debut for KKR and failed to inspire any confidence. Barring spinner Sunil Narine, who returned with 1/24 from his four overs, none of the KKR

bowlers made any impact. IPL's costliest buy Starc has been their biggest letdown and KKR would hope that the Aussie hits his stride soon after overcoming the thumb injury.

In bowling, Kuldeep Yadav who was sidelined under Dinesh Karthik while he was with KKR, will look to prove a point against the Kolkatans as he along with left-arm spinner Axar Patel has formed a formidable spin pair.

However, the home side has some positives to look up to. Narine's sensational form with the bat -- 357 runs from eight matches with two fifties and one century -- has given a thrust to their batting up the order this season.

Narine and Phil Salt have scored bulk of their runs at the top, but the likes of Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Shreyas Iyer, Rinku Singh, Andre Russell and Ramandeep Singh will have to chip in with a bit more runs.

After this match, KKR will be on the road to face Mumbai and Lucknow, hence they will be eager to register a win before those tougher assignments and keep themselves in the play-off race.

**TEAMS (FROM)**  
**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarty, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain and Muejeb Ur Rahman.  
**Delhi Capitals:** Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kushagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Gulbadin Naib, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk.

## India should pick two wrist spinners for T20 WC: Irfan

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former all-rounder Irfan Pathan said India must pick five specialist bowlers along with two wrist-spinners in their squad for the upcoming T20 World Cup to be played in the Caribbean and the USA.

With the May 1 deadline for the squad announcement approaching fast, discussions have intensified around the combination of India's squad for the showpiece event starting on June 2.

"You need five good bowlers - that's a must. What are your wicket-taking options? When you're talking about Ravindra Jadeja at No. 8 and playing as a spin (all-rounder), I would rather have two wrist-spinners playing," Pathan told Star Sports.

"I would rather have two proper wrist-spinners playing, (Ravi) Bishnoi and Kuldeep (Yadav), in my playing XI. If you look at Bishnoi's numbers, you know, when he played, he was pretty good." Pathan, however, is not in favour of calling up Rajasthan Royals' Yuzvendra Chahal for the World Cup.



"Yes, we're talking about Chahal right now because of the IPL performances but don't forget the fielding part of it as well. If you have to balance the fielding, you have to balance where a bowler can bowl at the particular area," he said.

Pathan conceded that Jasprit Bumrah is the only automatic selection among the bowlers.

"There's only one player who you can blindly say (certain for selection) is Bumrah. But apart from Bumrah, you need at least two fast bowlers who can be part of the regular XI," the former India cricketer said.

"The biggest problem the Indian team has is the

combination of fast bowling. It's very important to fix that combination, so go towards experience.

"With Bumrah, you can see (Mohammed) Siraj and Arshdeep (Singh) there, which I don't think is ideal, but this is the only option you have now," he said.

Former India batter K Srikanth, meanwhile, is not in favour of Siraj being selected for the World Cup.

"Bumrah is in the squad. Arshdeep as well. But the third pacer can't be Siraj. He'll bowl well in one game and then not perform in 10 games. He's an erratic bowler, you saw it in the World Cup," he

said.

"That's why I'm saying we should look at who's bowling well in the death overs, and that is Avesh Khan. He's been performing well and he's done well on the international front, he has a little experience as well. He's mastered the wide yorkers also," Srikanth added.

However, former Australia all-rounder Tom Moody backed Siraj. "He looks mentally and physically fatigued. He has come into this IPL having played a lot of all format cricket for India for a long period of time," he said.

"He plays his cricket in the IPL at probably the hardest venue (Bengaluru) whether you bowl quick or you bowl spin - that needs to be taken into consideration. The third thing is he's playing in a poor side. RCB have been a poor side this year and it's very hard to rise with what's happening around you."

"I would back him 100 per cent to step up in the World Cup, purely because if you look at historically what he's done for India and even what he did in the IPL last year," Moody added.

## Samson, Rahul put their hands up for WC selection: Smith

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The classy fifties made by Sanju Samson and KL Rahul in the IPL has intensified the race for the second wicketkeeper's slot in the Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup, reckoned former South African captain Graeme Smith.

The Indian squad for the marquee event in June is set to

be announced soon and Rishabh Pant is set to be drafted in as the first-choice wicketkeeper-batter.

"They (Rahul and Samson) needed to build a partnership. Rahul did it with (Deepak) Hooda and Sanju did it beautifully with Dhruv Jurel. The difference was that Sanju finished the game, while KL got out at a key phase. But it was brilliant to see both excellent players put their

hands up for World Cup selection," said Smith in JioCinema.

Rahul made a 48-ball 76 for Lucknow Super Giants, but Samson trumped that effort with an unbeaten 71 off 33 balls as Rajasthan Royals cruised to a seven-wicket victory.

Former Australian pacer Brett Lee lauded Jurel for supporting Samson with a fine 52 not out off 34 balls

during their unbroken fourth wicket stand that was worth 121 runs.

"He's a quality batter. He's got proper cricket shots. He can play all formats of the game and knows when to go through the gears as needed. His shots are classy and have the power to go towards the cow corner. He shows his class and continues to grow in stature," said the New South Welshman.

## Batters have evolved quicker than bowlers in IPL: Klusener

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants assistant coach Lance Klusener placed the quicker evolution of batters as reason behind the frequent tall team totals in the ongoing Indian Premier League.

The teams have been going past 200 and even 250 quite effortlessly in this IPL, and the former South African all-rounder opined that the modest performance by bowlers at death overs too has helped batters to add quick runs.

"Just looking at the bowling

performances throughout the competition, for me, they have been quite disappointing. There hasn't been a lot of good bowling," Klusener told the media after LSG's seven-wicket loss to Rajasthan Royals here on Saturday.

"There's been a lot of ordinary bowling and batsmen are just so good these days, they're taking advantage. Maybe the batsmen have evolved a lot quicker than the bowlers in this competition.

"I haven't seen a lot of good death bowling in the competition and that's why



teams have been able to take advantage. Sure, surfaces have

been flat. I haven't seen a lot of swing either," he added.

Klusener observed that the bowlers are opting for several variations at death but they have not been using the wide yorkers enough.

"It's easy to overcomplicate. If you run in and execute even four out of six yorkers... We don't see that anymore. We don't see that skill," he said.

"We're going to slower balls and a whole lot of other variations. That pure death bowling of yorkers, whether it's wide or straight, that's a skill that we don't see very often these days," he added.

## OTHER SPORTS

### Archery WC: India men team shocks Olympic champions Korea to bag historic gold

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Indian men's recurve team of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav shocked reigning Olympic champions South Korea in a historic win to land an Archery World Cup gold medal after 14 years, here on Sunday.

This triumph over the archery powerhouse in well over a decade also comes as a boost to their chances of securing a berth in the upcoming Paris Olympics.

The trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep and Pravin showed ice-cool composure to get the better of mighty Koreans without dropping a set.

The 40-year-old Army man Tarundeep was also a part of



the gold medal-winning team in Shanghai World Cup Stage 4 in August 2010. Then the recurve team comprising Rahul Banerjee, Tarundeep and Jayanta defeated Japan. In a battle between the top-two seeds of the competition, India won 5-1 (57-57, 57-55, 55-53), taking their gold medal count to five in the season-opening Stage 1 World Cup.

The success also rubbed on

the recurve mixed team of Ankita Bhakat and Dhiraj who trounced Alejandra Valencia and Matias Grande of Mexico 6-0 (35-31, 38-35, 39-37) to win bronze. On a comeback trail after missing the whole 2023 after becoming mother in December 2022, Deepika Kumari faltered in the final hurdle to settle for a silver in the women's recurve individual section.

### Messi gets two goals in front of record New England crowd

AP ■ MASSACHUSETTS (US)

Lionel Messi scored two goals to excite a New England Revolution-record crowd, leading Inter Miami CF to a 4-1 victory on Saturday night.

Messi didn't disappoint the crowd of 65,612 that filled Gillette Stadium, scoring on a left-footed kick from deep inside the box for his ninth goal of the season, breaking a 1-all tie in the 68th minute.

In fact, he made a little history, too. Miami posted on the social platform X that he was the first player in MLS history to record 16 goal contributions in his first seven games of a season.

"Obviously, he's done it his whole life. We expect it from him," said teammate

Benjamin Cremaschi, who scored the third goal after Messi's shot was stopped. "He makes it look so easy. We're just happy that we have him by our side. When he has the opportunity, he takes it."

The attendance beat the previous record of 61,316, when the Revolution lost to the LA Galaxy in the 2002 MLS final.

In the opening half, he was a few feet inside the box, scoring on a left-foot kick to tie it at 1-1 in the 32nd minute.

"I thought in the first half, after (our) goal, we had them locked up pretty good," New England coach Caleb Porter said. "They weren't getting many chances, they weren't getting a lot of time and space to operate," he said.

### Indian women team seals Uber Cup quarterfinal spot

PTI ■ CHENGDU (CHINA)

Isharani Baruah and Anmol Kharb shone bright as the Indian women's team entered the quarterfinals of the Uber Cup badminton tournament with a lopsided 4-1 win over Singapore in the second tie of group A, here on Sunday.

Asian champions India, who had defeated Canada 4-1 in the opening tie, produced another fine show as they recovered from the opening match loss of Ashmita Chaliha and went on to win the rest of the contests with ease to come up trumps.

It turned out to be a fine weekend for the young and inexperienced Indian side who were missing the big guns, but they displayed their skill and temperament at the big stage to win two out of two ties.

China blanked Canada 3-0 in another group A match and



the result was enough for both India and their Asian neighbours to seal the quarterfinal spot.

With the twin victories, India are now placed in the second position behind China in Group A. The two teams will clash on Tuesday in their final group match to decide the top spot.

The 53rd-ranked Chaliha, who had outwitted Canada's Michelle Li on Saturday, found the going tough

against world No. 18 Yeo Jia Min on Sunday, going down 15-21, 18-21.

National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra, ranked 67, then brought India back with a 21-15, 21-16 win over Xiao En Heng and Jin Yu Jia in the first women's doubles.

Isharani, ranked 83rd, went on to double India's lead by claiming a 21-13, 21-16 win over Insyrah Khan in the second singles.

## 2012 Olympic champion Gabby competes for first time in eight years at American Classic

AP ■ TEXAS

Whether the gymnastics star's return to the sport carries all the way to the Paris Olympics remains to be seen.

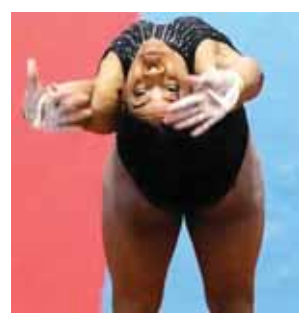
Douglas, who became the first Black woman to win the Olympic all-around title when she triumphed in London in 2012, competed for the first time in eight

years on Saturday at the American Classic.

The 28-year-old looked rusty in spots and promising in others while posting a score of 50.65 in the all-around. Douglas qualified in multiple events for the U.S. Championships in Fort Worth, Texas, next month. She will get another chance to qualify for the all-around competition at nationals

when she takes the floor at the the U.S. Classic in Hartford, Connecticut, on May 18.

Douglas last competed at the 2016 Rio Olympics, where she helped the Americans claim a second straight gold in the team competition. She took an extended break from the sport but never officially retired. The itch to come back returned while



watching the 2022 U.S. Championships, and she's spent the better part of the last two years training in the Dallas area with an eye toward trying to make the five-woman U.S. Team that will be heavily favored to win gold in Paris this summer.

Her comeback, however, has been shrouded in mystery. She was supposed to compete at Winter Cup in February

but she pulled out of the competition just days before after testing positive for COVID-19. She has limited press exposure and unlike 2020 Olympic gold medalist Sunisa Lee and Jade Carey - both of whom competed at American Classic - she opted not to participate in podium training on Friday.

Douglas walked out onto the floor about an hour before

competition and showed flashes of what turned her into a star in London. Her double-twisting Yurchenko on vault had plenty of amplitude and on bars - her best event - she had the pieces of a routine that would certainly be competitive at the elite level.

The challenge will be finding a way to put all the pieces together consistently.

Douglas came off bars twice and her floor routine lacked the crispness and endurance to stack up with what will be required for anyone hoping to make a serious bid for the Olympic team. There is time for Douglas, but not much. The U.S. Classic is in three weeks.

The U.S. Championships are in five and the Olympic Trials await in Minneapolis in late June.